he World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S Mystery Magazine

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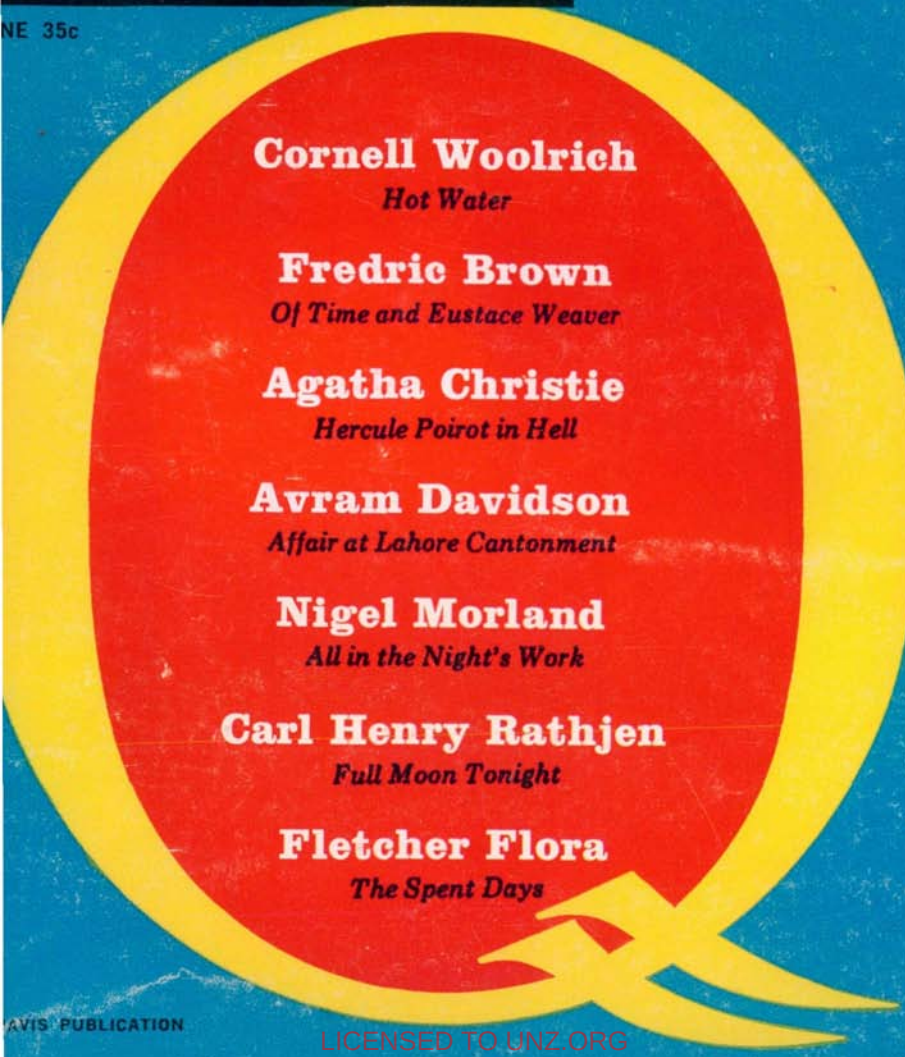

Cornell Woolrich
Hot Water

Fredric Brown
Of Time and Eustace Weaver

Agatha Christie
Hercule Poirot in Hell

Avram Davidson
Affair at Lahore Cantonment

Nigel Morland
All in the Night's Work

Carl Henry Rathjen
Full Moon Tonight

Fletcher Flora
The Spent Days

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The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

***including* BLACK MASK MAGAZINE**

Printed in 7 editions — American, Australian, English, French, Italian, Japanese, & Portuguese

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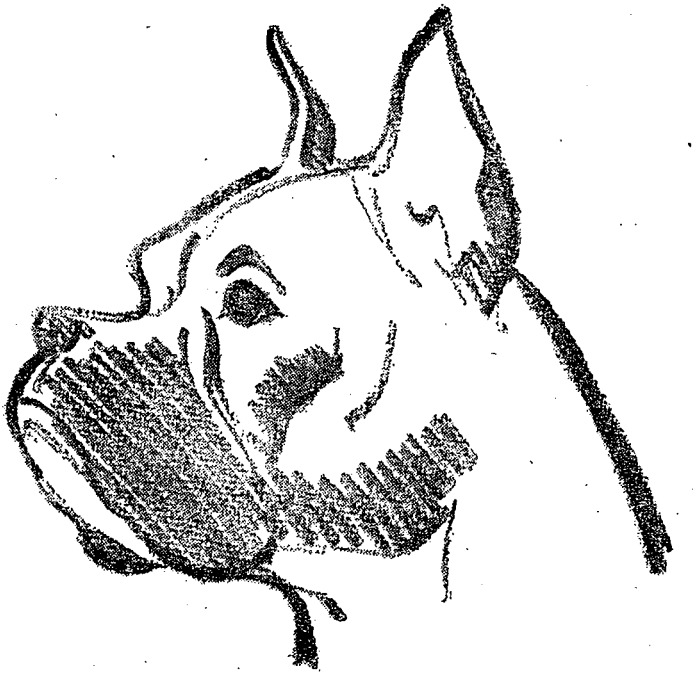

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a new story by

AVRAM DAVIDSON

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	AVRAM DAVIDSON
TITLE:	*The Affair at Lahore Cantonment*
TYPE:	Crime Story
LOCALES:	England and India
TIME:	The Present and the Past
COMMENTS:	*No one in the pub really believed the Gaffer's tales of the past—"but for those who are insatiably curious there are always the newspaper files to check."*

IT IS SOME TIME BEFORE DAWN, IN the late spring, as I write this. The seagulls have more than an hour before it will be their moment to fly in from the river, screeing and crying, and then fly back. After them, the pigeons will murmur, and it will be day, perhaps a hot, sticky day. Right now the air is deliciously cool, but I find myself shivering. I find myself imagining the cold, the bitter cold, of that morning when Death came in full panoply, like one dressed for dinner. That morning so very long ago . . .

In the winter of 1946-7 it was cold enough to suit me, and more, although the thermometer was well above what I used to consider a cold winter at home. But I was then in England, and the wet and the chill never seemed to leave me. The cottage where I was staying had the most marvelous picturesque fireplaces—it had them in every single room, in fact. But coal was rationed and firewood seemed not only unavailable, it seemed unheard of. There was an antique electric heater, but it emitted only a dull coppery glow which died out a few inches away. The only gas fire was, naturally enough, in the kitchen, a cramped and tiny room, where it was impossible to write.

And it was in order to write that I was in England. In the mornings I visited the private library, fortu-

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nately unbombed, where lay a mass of material unavailable in America. Afternoons I did the actual writing. In the early evenings I listened to the Third Program while I looked over what I had written, and revised it.

Late evenings? It was, as I say, cold. Raw and damp. I could retire to bed with a brace of hot water bottles and read. I could go to the movies. I could go to the local, see if they had any spirits left, or, failing that—and it usually failed—have a mug of cider. Beer, I don't care for. The local was named . . . well, I won't say exactly what it was named. It may have been called The Green Man. Or The Grapes. Or The Something Arms. A certain measure of reticence is, I think, called for, although by now the last of the principals in the story must surely be dead. But for those who are insatiably curious there are always the newspaper files to check.

But be all that as it may. It was eight o'clock at night. The Marx Brothers were playing at the cinema, but I had seen this one twice before the War and twice during the War. My two hot water bottles gaped pinkly, ready to preserve my feet from frostbite if I cared to retire early to bed. I would have, but it happened that the only reading matter was a large and illustrated work on Etruscan tombs.

So the local won. It was really no contest.

It was warm there, and noisy and smoky and sociable. True, almost none of the sociability was directed my way, but as long as I wasn't openly being hated, I didn't care. Besides, we were all in luck: there *was* whiskey on hand. Gin, too. I drank slowly of the stuff that keeps the bare knees of Scotland warm and watched the people at their quaint native rituals—darts, football pools, even skittles.

A large, rather loutish-looking man at my right, who had made somewhat of a point of ignoring me, said suddenly, "Ah, Gaffer's heard there's gin!" A sort of ripple ran through the crowded room, and I turned around to look.

A man and a woman had come in. A little husk of a shriveled old man, wrapped almost to the tip of his rufous nose. An old woman, evidently his wife, was with him, and she helped undo the cocoon of overcoat, pullover, and muffler that, once removed, seemed to reduce him by half. They were obviously known and liked.

"Hello, Gaffer," the people greeted him. "Hello, Ma."

"I don't know if I'll be able to come fetch him when it's his going-home time," she said.

"I can manage meself, Missus," the old man said querulously.

"If I don't turn up, some of you give him a hand and see he has all his buttons buttoned. One gin and two ales, Alfred—no more, mind!" And with a brisk, keen look all around she was off.

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She seemed the younger of the two, but it may not have been a matter of years. Thin, she was, white-haired and wrinkled; but there was no pink or gray softness about her. Her black eyes snapped as she looked around. Her back was straight. There was something not quite local in the accents of her speech—a certain lilting quality.

The old man was given a seat at a table near me and the fellow who had first announced the old man's entrance now said, "Got your pension today, eh, Gaffer? Stand us a drink, there's a good fellow."

The old man stared at a palmful of change, then stirred it with a twisted finger. "My missus hasn't given me but enough for the gin and the two ales," he said.

"Ah, Tom's only having his games with you, Gaffer," someone said. "He does with everyone. Pay no mind." And they resumed their conversation where they'd left off, the chief topic of the night being that the English wife of an American serviceman stationed in the county had given birth to triplets. "Ah, those Yanks," they said indulgently.

"'Ah, those Yanks,'" Tom mimicked. His spectacles were mended on the bridge with tape. "They get roaring drunk on the best whiskey that you and me can't find and couldn't afford to buy it if we could; they smash up cars like they cost nothing—you and me couldn't buy them if we saved forever. Curse and brawl like proper savages, they do."

There was an embarrassed silence. Someone said, "Now, Tom —" Someone looked at me, and away, quickly. And someone muttered, rather weakly, about there being "good and bad in all nations." I said nothing, telling myself that there was no point in getting into a quarrel with a middle-aged man whose grievances doubtless would be as great if all Americans, civil and military, vanished overnight from the United Kingdom.

To my surprise, and to everyone else's, it was the Gaffer who spoke up against the charge.

"You don't know what you're talking about, laddie-boy," he said to Tom, who must have been fifty, at least. "'Tisn't that they're Yanks at all. 'Tis that they're soldiers, and in a strange land. That's a wicked life for a man. I've seen it meself. I could tell you a story—"

"Sweet Fanny Adams, no, don't!" Tom said loudly—an outburst which did nothing to increase his popularity. "I heard 'em all, millions of times. The old garrison at Lahore and the Pay-thans and the Af-gains and the Tarradiddles, mountain guns and mules, and, oh, the whole bloody parade. Give us a rest, Gaffer!"

He could have killed the old man with a slap of his hand, I suppose, the Gaffer looked that feeble. But he couldn't shut the old man up, now he'd had his sip of gin.

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"No, you don't want to hear naught about it, but I'll tell it anyway. Me, that was fighting for the flag before you was born." For a moment his faded blue eyes seemed puzzled. "Oh, but I have seen terrible things," he said in a voice altogether different from his vigorously annoyed tone of a second before. "And the most terrible thing of all—to see my friend die before my eyes, and he died hard, and not to be able to do aught to help him." His words died off with a slow quiver.

Tom wasn't giving up that easily. "What's the football news?" he asked at large. No one answered.

"And not just the fighting in the Hills," the Gaffer went on. "What was that all for? India? They're giving India away now. No—other things . . . My *best* friend."

"How about a game of darts?" Tom urged, gesturing toward the back room, through the open door of which we could see the darts board and a frieze of old pictures which dated back six reigns or more. I'd often meant to examine them with attention, but never had.

" . . . and it's all true, for I've got cuttin's to prove it. Young chap from newspaper was there and saw it and wrote it all up. Oh, it was terrible!" Tears welled to the reddened edges of his eyes. "But it had to be."

"Anyone for *darts?*"

Someone said, "Shut up, Tom. Go on, Gaffer."

And this was many years ago.

As you went along the Mall in Lahore (which was the local section of the Grand Trunk Road from Calcutta to Peshawur), you passed the museum and the cathedral and the Gardens and Government House and the Punjab Club. And you kept on passing, because you were an enlisted man and the Club was for officers and civilians of high rank. And then for three dusty miles there was nothing to speak of (natives hardly counted), and then there was the Cantonment, and in the Cantonment was the garrison.

"Head-bloody-quarters of the Third bloody Division of the Northern bloody Army," said the Docker. He spat into the dust. "And you can 'ave it all for one bloody yard of the Commercial Road of a Saturday night," he said. "Or *any* bloody night, for that matter!"

But his friend, the Mouse, knew nothing of the glories of the Commercial Road. He had taken the Queen's shilling in the market town that all his life he had regarded as if it were London, Baghdad, and Babylon. Lahore? He would have 'listed to go serve in Kamtchatka, if it had only got him away from his brute of a father, a drunken farm-laborer in a dirty smock. How, he often wondered, had he got the courage to take the step at all?

"It frightens me sometimes, Doc-

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ker," he confessed. "It's all so strange and different."

The Docker gave him a look on which his habitual sneer was half overcome by affection. "Don't you 'ave no bloody fear while *I'm* wiv you!" And he touched him, very lightly, on the shoulder. The Docker was tall and strong, with straight black hair and sallow skin and a mouth that was quick to anger and quick to foul words even without anger, and a mind that was quick to take offense and slow—very slow—to forgive.

Sergeant-Major had shouted, "I'll teach you to look at me!" and had kicked him hard. That night in the lanes on the other side of the little bazaar, past the tank and the place where the hafiz taught, someone hit Sergeant-Major with a piece of iron, thrown with main force. Split his scalp open. Who? No one ever knew. When Sergeant-Major came off sick-list and went round telling about it, spreading his hair with his thick fingers to show the long and ugly wound with its black scab, the Docker passed by, walking proper slow. And Sergeant-Major looked up, suddenly, as if he recognized the footfalls, and there was a look passed between them that had murder in it. But nothing was said, nothing at all.

And no one kicked the Docker after that, and when it became known that he was the pal of the little private everyone called the Mouse, because of his coloring and his timid ways, why, no one kicked the Mouse either, after that.

"See that blackie there, Docker?" the Mouse demanded. "See that white bit of string round his waist and over? He's what they call a braymin. Like our parson back 'ome—only, fancy a parson with not more clothes on than that!"

A mild interest stirred the big soldier's face. "Knew a parson give me sixpence once, when I was a nipper," he said. "Only I 'ad to come to church and let 'im christen me, like, afore 'e'd leave me 'ave it. Nice old chap. Bit dotty."

The crowd was thick on the road, but somehow there was always space where the soldiers walked. They passed a blind Jew from Peshawur, with a gray lambskin cap on his head, playing music on the harmonium. It wasn't like any music the Mouse had ever heard, but it stirred him all the same. The Docker grandly threw a few pice in the cup and his little friend admired the gesture.

"That lane there—" the mouse drew close, dropped his voice—"they say there's women there. They say some of'm won't look at sojers. But they say that some of'm will."

The Docker set his cap acock on his head. "Let's 'ave a look, then, kiddy," he said. "And see which ones will." But they never did—at least, not that day. Because they met Lance-Corporal Owen going to the bazaar and with him were

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three young ladies, with ruffles and fancy hats and parasols. They were going to the bazaar to help Lance-Corporal Owen buy gifts to send home to his mother and sisters. And this was quite a coincidence, because when the Docker heard it he at once explained that he and the Mouse were bound on the same errand.

"Only they say the best prices are at the places where they don't speak English. And Alf, 'ere, and me, we don't know none of this Punjabee-talk, y'see."

And because the young ladies—two of whom were named Cruceiro and one De Silva, and they were cousins—said that they knew a few words and would be pleased to help Lance-Corporal Owen's friends, and because Owen was very decent about it all—and why not, seeing that he had three of them?—they all walked off, three pairs of them. The Mouse had the youngest Miss Cruceiro on his arm, and the Docker had Miss De Silva. Perhaps Owen wasn't quite so pleased with this arrangement, but he smiled.

That was how it began, many years ago.

Harry Owen was a proper figure of a man: broad shoulders, narrow waist, chestnut-colored hair, eyes as bright blue as could be. Always smiling and showing his good, white teeth. Not many men had teeth that good. Even the wives of the officers didn't feel themselves too proud to say, "Good morning, Owen." It was as if there was a sun inside of him, shining all the time.

The three of them became friends. The *six* of them. The Docker and Leah De Silva, Harry and Margaret Cruceiro, and the Mouse and Lucy Cruceiro. To be sure, Lucy was rather dim and didn't say much, but that suited her escort well enough: he had little to say to her. But he would have felt all sorts of things bubbling up inside of him—if he had been walking with Miss De Silva.

But that, he knew, was impossible. Miss De Silva was so clever, so handsome, so self-assured; he would have been tongued-tied beside her. Besides, she walked with the Docker. And so, for all that she was pleasant to the Mouse, he was too shy to do much more than nod.

Later on he was to think that if the Docker had known that Leah De Silva was not really English, and that she and her cousins and all the others of their class were not regarded by the soldiery as . . . well . . .

But he did not know. Chasteness was not a highly prized attribute in Cat's-meat Court where the Docker's wild, slumb-arab childhood had been largely spent—indeed, it was a quality almost completely unknown. He had no experience of respectable girls, neither half-caste nor quarter-caste nor simon-pure English. The daughters of the officers lived in a world sealed off

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from him, and the few daughters of NCOs almost as much so.

To men like Lance-Corporal Owen, Eurasian girls may have seemed to lack that certain quality which spelled Rude Hands Off, which the English girls at home had had. But the Docker knew nothing of afternoon teas and tiny sandwiches, of strict papas and watchful mamas, of prim and chaperoned walks in country towns. For him the Victorian Age had never existed, raised as he had been in a world little changed from the fierce and savage eighteenth Century.

But this did not bring him to take liberties now. On the contrary. To the Docker a railroad telegrapher (for such was Mr. De Silva, burly and black-mustached) was a member of a learned profession. He little noticed that the ever-blooming Mrs. De Silva wore no corsets and let her younger children run about the house naked. And little cared. He knew that there were girls to be had for a thrupney-bit and there were girls who were not. All the latter were respectable. No cottage in Kensington could have been more respectable, in the Docker's eyes, than the old house where the De Silvas lived, three or four generations of them, in dark and not always orderly rooms smelling of incense and odd sorts of cooking. That the girls were not exactly bleached-white in complexion was nothing to him; the Docker was dark himself. When Mr. and Mrs. De Silva boasted of their ancestry—of Portuguese generals and high-ranking officials of the old East India Company—the Docker felt no desire to doubt. He felt humble.

Miss Leah De Silva was quiet and ladylike enough when talking to the Docker. But she could be fierce and sudden when someone in her family did anything she thought not right. Perhaps her parents had been something less than keen as mustard about the Docker. He was only a corporal. Did they feel that their daughter should look higher? A sentence like a shower of swords from Leah, in a language which had once been Portuguese, silenced them.

One afternoon, when the barracks were almost deserted, the Docker summoned Owen and the Mouse to consult with. He produced a bottle and offered it.

"And risk my stripe? Thanks, my boy, but no thanks," said Owen. The Mouse took a small sip. The Docker's manner was very odd, he thought. He was proud and he was abashed; he was happy and he was uneasy.

"'Ere's the thing," he said. "I mean to marry Miss De Silva." And he gave them a challenging look.

"Good!" said the Mouse.

"I know she'll 'ave me," the Docker went on. "But . . . well . . . there's Susanna."

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"Oh, ah," agreed Owen. "There's Susanna."

Susanna was a girl who had a little house of her own, often visited by soldiers, one of whom had been the Docker. Her mother was a woman of some tribe so very deep in the Hills that they were neither Hindu nor Moslem. Heaven only knew how she had come to Lahore, or where she had gone after leaving it—for leave it she did, after her baby was born; and Heaven, presumably, knew who the father had been.

Susanna had been raised and educated by the Scottish Mission and had once been employed in the tracts department of its Printing Establishment. The officials of the Mission had been willing to forgive Susanna once, then twice—they had even been willing to forgive Susanna a third time—but not to retain her in the Printing Establishment. Whereupon Susanna had renounced the Church of Scotland and all its works, and had gone altogether to the bad.

"I'm going to break off wiv 'er," said the Docker determinedly. "I shan't give 'er no present, neither —no money, I mean. I know it's the custom, but if I'm going to be married I shall need all the money I've got."

"That's rather hard on Susanna," said Owen.

"Can't be 'elped," said the Docker briefly. "Now I'm going to write 'er a letter." He wanted assistance, but he also was strong for his own style. The letter, in its third and least-smudged version, was brief.

Dear Friend,

It's been a great lark but now it's all over, for I am getting married to someone else. Best not to see each other again. Keep merry and bright.

Respectfully,

"That'll do it," the Docker said, with satisfaction. "Here's two annas—give 'em to a bearer, one of you, and send the letter off directly. I'm going to start tidying up meself and me kit, as I mean to speak to Mr. De Silva tonight."

But he never spoke to Mr. De Silva that night. Sergeant-Major came striding in, big as Kachenjunga, and swollen with violent satisfaction, and found the bottle in with the Docker's gear. The Docker drew three weeks, and was lucky not to lose his stripes.

There was a note waiting for him when he came out.

Dear Docker,—

I hope you will take it in good part but Miss De Silva and I are going to be married Sunday next. Perhaps it was not quite the thing for me to do—to speak during your absence—but Love knows no laws as the poet says and we do both hope you will be our friend,

Sincerely,
Harry Owen

For a long time the Docker just sat and stared. Then he said to the Mouse, "Well, if it must be. I should 'ave known a girl of 'er

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quality wouldn't ever marry a brute like me."

"Ah, but Docker," the Mouse said. Then in a rush of words: "It isn't that at all! Don't you see what it was? The note you meant for Susanna—Owen sent it off to Miss De Silva instead! And then went and proposed 'imself! And it must've been 'im who peached that you 'ad the bottle."

The Docker's face went dark, but his voice kept soft. "Oh," he said, "that was how it was." And said nothing more. That night he got drunk, wildly, savagely drunk, wrecked twenty stalls in the little bazaar, half killed two Sikhs who tried to stop him, and coming into the sleeping barracks as silently as the dust, took and loaded his rifle and shot Harry Owen through the head . . .

"Yarn, yarn, yarn!" said Tom. "I don't believe you was ever in India in your life!"

The Gaffer, who had been sipping his beer silently, fired up.

"Ho, don't you! One of you fetch that pict're—the one directly under the old king's—"

He gestured toward the rear room. In very short time someone was back and handed over an old cardboard-backed photograph. It was badly faded, but it showed plainly enough three soldiers posed in front of a painted backdrop. They wore ornate and tight-fitting uniforms and had funny, jaunty little caps perched to one side of their heads.

"That 'un's me," said the Gaffer, pointing his twisted old finger. The faces all looked alike, but the one in the middle was that of the shortest.

When it was passed to me I turned it over. The back was ornately printed with the studio's name and sure enough, it was in Lahore—a fact I pointed out, not directly to Tom, but in his general direction; and in one corner, somehow bare of curlicues, was written in faded ink a date in the late '80s, and three names: *Lance-Corporal Harry Owen, Corporal Daniel Devore, Private Alfred Graham.*

". . . young chap from newspaper was talking about it to the Padre Sahib," the Gaffer was saying. "Earnest young fellow, 'ad spectacles, young's 'e was. 'But a thing like that, sir,' says 'e, 'so unlike a British soldier—what could've made him do a thing like that?' And the Chaplain looks at 'im and sighs and says, 'Single men in barracks don't turn into plaster saints.' The writing-wallah thought this over a bit, then, 'No,' 'e says, 'I suppose not,' and wrote it down in 'is notebook."

"Well," Tom said grudgingly, "so you've been to India. But that doesn't prove the rest of the story."

"It's true, I tell you. I've got cuttin's to prove it. *Civil And Military Gazette* of Lahore."

Tom began singing:

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"All this happened in Darby
(I never was known to lie.)
And if you'd 'a' been there in Darby
You'd 'a' seen it, the same as I."

Someone laughed. Tears started in the old man's weak blue eyes, and threatened to overflow the reddened rims. "I've got cuttin's."

Tom said, "Yes, you've always got cuttin's. But nobody does see 'em but you."

"You come 'ome with me," the Gaffer said, pushing his nobby old hands against the table top and making to rise. "You come 'ome with me. The cuttin's are in my old trunk and you ask my missus—for she keeps the keys—you just ask my missus."

"What!" cried Tom. "Me ask your missus for anything? Why, I'd as soon ask a lion or a tiger at Whipsnade Zoo for a bit o' their meat, as ask your missus for anything. She's a Tartar, *she* is!"

The Gaffer's mind had evidently dropped the burden of the conversation. He began to nod and smile as if Tom had paid him a very acceptable compliment. But he seemed to recall the object of Tom's remarks, rather than their tone.

"Oh, she was a lovely creature," he said softly. "Most beautiful girl you ever saw. And it was me that she married, after all, y'see. Not either of them two others, but *me,* that they called the Mouse!" And he chuckled. It was not a nice chuckle, and as I looked up, sharply, I caught his eye, and there was something sly and very ugly in it.

I went cold. In one second I was all but certain of two things. "Gaffer," I said, trying to sound casual. "What was your wife's maiden name?"

The Gaffer seemed deep in thought, but he answered, as casually as I'd asked, "Her name? Her name was Leah De Silva. Part British, part Portugee, and part—but who cares about that? Not I. I married her in church, I did."

"And how," I asked, "do you pronounce D-e-v-o-r-e?"

The dim eyes wavered. "Worked in the West India Docks, was why we called him the Docker," said the old man. "But his Christian name, it was Dan'l Deever."

"Yes," I said. "Of course it was. And it wasn't Harry Owen who peached about the whiskey bottle in Dan'l's gear, so as to get him in the guardhouse—and it wasn't Harry Owen who sent the note to the wrong young lady—was it? It was someone who knew what Harry would do if he had the chance. Someone who knew that the Docker would certainly kill Harry, if told the right set of lies. And he did, didn't he? And then the way was all clear and open for you, wasn't it?"

For just a second there was fear in Gaffer Graham's face. And there was defiance, too. And triumph. Then, swiftly, all were gone, and only the muddled memories of old age were left.

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"It was cold," he whimpered. "It was bitter cold when they hanged Danny Deever in the morning. There was that young chap from the newspaper, that wrote about it. Funny name 'e 'ad —somethin' like Kipling—Ruddy Kipling, 'twas."

"Yes," I said, "something like that."

EDITORS' NOTE: *It has just occurred to us that we have not reread "Danny Deever" for—good Lord, it's at least thirty years! And perhaps you too have not reread "Danny Deever" for a long time. So here, to refresh your memory, is the full text of Rudyard Kipling's famous poem—which is so vitally connected with Avram Davidson's fascinating story . . .*

When we were halfway through our first reading of Mr. Davidson's story, we found ourselves infuriated. How dare so individual and talented a writer as Avram Davidson send us so blatant an imitation of Kipling? But when we had finished, we figuratively ate our words: the Kiplingesque style, mood, and background are integral, essential, even inspired elements in Mr. Davidson's story. And how well he has captured the authentic Kipling flavor!

DANNY DEEVER

by Rudyard Kipling

"What are the bugles blowin' for?" said Files-on-Parade.
"To turn you out, to turn you out," the Color-Sergeant said.
"What makes you look so white, so white?" said Files-on-Parade.
"I'm dreadin' what I've got to watch," the Color-Sergeant said.

For they're hangin' Danny Deever, you can 'ear the Dead March play,
The regiment's in 'ollow square—they're hangin' him to-day;
They've taken of his buttons off an' cut his stripes away,
An' they're hangin' Danny Deever in the mornin'.

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"What makes the rear-rank breathe so 'ard!" said Files-on-Parade.
"It's bitter cold, it's bitter cold." the Color-Sergeant said.
"What makes the front-rank man fall down?" says Files-on-Parade.
"A touch of sun, a touch of sun," the Color-Sergeant said.

They are hangin' Danny Deever, they are marchin' of 'im round,
They 'ave 'alted Danny Deever by 'is coffin on the ground;
An' 'e'll swing in 'arf a minute for a sneakin', shootin' hound—
O they're hangin' Danny Deever in the mornin'!

"'Is cot was right-'and cot to mine," said Files-on-Parade.
"'E's sleepin' out an' far to-night," the Color-Sergeant said.
"I've drunk 'is beer a score o' times," said Files-on-Parade.
"'E's drinkin' bitter beer alone," the Color-Sergeant said.

They are hangin' Danny Deever, you must mark 'im to 'is place,
For 'e shot a comrade sleepin'—you must look 'im in the face;
Nine 'undred of 'is county an' the regiment's disgrace,
While they're hangin' Danny Deever in the mornin'.

"What's that so black agin the sun? said Files-on-Parade.
"It's Danny fightin' 'ard for life," the Color-Sergeant said.
"What's that that whimpers over'ead?" said Files-on-Parade.
"It's Danny's soul that's passin' now," the Color-Sergeant said.

For they're done with Danny Deever, you can 'ear the quickstep play,
The regiment's in column an' they're marchin' us away;
Ho! the young recruits are shakin', an' they'll want their beer to-day,
After hangin' Danny Deever in the mornin'.

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a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **FREDRIC BROWN**

TITLE: ***Of Time and Eustace Weaver***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: Present, Past, and Future

COMMENTS: *A time lock on a supermarket safe should be duck soup for a time machine . . .*

WHEN EUSTACE WEAVER INvented his time machine he was a very happy man. He knew that he had the world by the tail on a downhill pull, as long as he kept his invention a secret. He could become the richest man in the world, wealthy beyond the dreams of avarice. All he had to do was to take short trips into the future to learn which stocks had gone up and which horses had won races, then come back to the present and buy those stocks or bet on those horses.

The races would come first, of course, because he would need substantial capital to play the market, whereas, at a track, he could start with a two-dollar bet and quickly parlay it into the thousands. Unfortunately, the only tracks operating at the present were in Southern California and Florida, about equidistant and about a hundred dollars' worth of plane fare away. He didn't have a fraction of that sum, and it would take him weeks to save that much out of his salary as stock clerk at a supermarket. It would be unbearable to have to wait that long to start getting rich.

Suddenly he remembered the safe at the supermarket where he worked—an afternoon-evening shift from one o'clock until the market closed at nine. There'd be at least a thousand dollars in that safe, and it had a time lock. What could be better than a time machine to beat a time lock?

When he went to work that day he took his invention with him. It was quite compact—he'd designed it to fit into a camera case he already had; so there was no difficulty involved in bringing the time

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machine into the store, and when he put his coat and hat into his locker, he put the time machine there too.

He worked his shift as usual until a few minutes before closing time. Then he hid behind a pile of cartons in the stock room. He felt sure that in the general exodus he wouldn't be missed, and he wasn't. Just the same he waited in his hiding place almost a full hour to make sure everyone else had left.

Then he emerged, got his time machine from the locker, and went to the safe. The safe was set to unlock itself automatically in another eleven hours; he set his time machine for just that length of time.

He took a firm grip on the safe's handle—he'd learned by experiments that anything he wore, carried, or hung onto traveled with him in time—and he pressed the button.

At first he felt no transition, but suddenly he heard the safe's mechanism click open—and at exactly the same moment he heard gasps and excited voices behind him. He whirled, realizing immediately the mistake he'd made; it was now nine o'clock the next morning and the store's employees—those on the early shift—were already there, had discovered that the safe was missing, and were standing amazed in a semicircle about the spot where it had stood—when the safe and Eustace Weaver had suddenly appeared.

Luckily he still had the time machine in his hand. Quickly he turned the dial back to zero—which he had calibrated to be the exact moment when he had perfected the invention—and again pressed the button.

And, of course, he was back before he had started, and . . .

When Eustace Weaver invented his time machine he knew that he had the world by the tail on a downhill pull, as long as he kept his invention a secret. To become rich all he had to do was take short trips into the future to see which horses were going to win and which stocks were going up, then come back and bet the horses or buy the stocks.

The horses came first because they would require less capital—but he didn't have plane fare to the nearest track where horses were running.

He thought of the safe in the supermarket where he worked as a stock clerk. That safe had at least a thousand dollars in it, and it had a time lock. A time lock should be duck soup for a time machine.

So when he went to work that day he took his time machine with him in a camera case and left it in his locker. When they closed at nine he hid in the stock room and waited an hour till he was sure everyone else had left. Then he got the time machine from his locker and went with it to the safe.

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He set the machine for eleven hours ahead—and then had a second thought. That setting would take him to nine o'clock the next morning. The safe would click open then, but the store would be open too and there'd be a lot of people around. So, instead, he set the machine ahead twenty-four hours, took hold of the handle of the safe, and then pressed the button on the time machine.

At first he thought nothing had happened. Then he found that the handle of the safe worked when he turned it and he knew that he'd made the jump to evening of the next day. And, of course, the time mechanism of the safe had unlocked en route.

He quickly opened the safe and took out all the paper money, stuffing it into his pockets.

He went to the alley door to let himself out, but before he reached for the bolt that kept it locked from the inside he had a sudden brilliant thought. If instead of leaving by a door he departed by using his time machine, he'd not only increase the mystery by leaving the store tightly locked on the inside, but he'd be taking himself *back in time and space* to the very moment when he had completed his invention—a day and a half *before the robbery*.

Then, by the time the robbery took place, he could establish an ironclad alibi: he'd be staying at a hotel in Florida or California, in either case over a thousand miles from the scene of the crime. He hadn't thought of his time machine as a maker of alibis, but now he saw it was perfect for that purpose.

He set the dial on zero and pressed the button.

When Eustace Weaver invented his time machine he knew that he had the world by the tail on a downhill pull, as long as he kept his invention a secret. By playing the races and the stock market he could make himself fabulously wealthy in short order. The only catch was that he was flat broke.

Suddenly he remembered the store where he worked and the safe in it that operated on a time lock. A time lock should be a cinch for a man with a time machine.

He sat down on the edge of his bed to think. He reached into his pocket for his cigarettes and pulled them out—but with them came paper money, a handful of ten-dollar bills! He tried other pockets and found banknotes in every one of them. He stacked the money on the bed beside him, and by counting the big bills and estimating the smaller ones, he found he had nearly $1500.

Suddenly he realized the truth, and laughed. He had *already* gone forward in time and emptied the supermarket safe; then he had used the time machine to return to the point in time when he had invented it. And since the burglary had not yet, in normal time, oc-

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curred, all he had to do was get out of town in a hurry and be a thousand miles away from the scene of the crime when it *did* happeen.

Two hours later he was on a plane bound for Los Angeles and the Santa Anita track—and doing some heavy thinking. One thing he had not anticipated was the apparent fact that when he returned from a jaunt into the future, he had no memory of whatever it was that hadn't happened yet.

But the money had come back with him. So, then, would any notes written to himself, or Racing Forms or financial pages from newspapers. It would work like a charm!

In Los Angeles he took a cab downtown and checked in at a good hotel. It was late evening by then and he briefly considered jumping himself into the next day to save waiting time, but he realized that he was tired and sleepy. He went to bed and slept until almost noon the next day.

His taxi got tangled in a jam on the freeway, so he didn't get to the track until the first race was over; but he was in time to read the winner's number on the tote board and to mark it on his dope sheet. He watched five more races, not betting but noting down the winner of each race, then decided not to bother with the last race. He left the grandstand and walked around behind and under it—to a secluded spot where no one could see him. He set the dial of his time machine two hours back, and pressed the button.

But nothing happened.

He tried again.

The same result.

Then he heard a voice behind him say, "It won't work. It's in a deactivating field."

Eustace whirled around and there standing behind him were two tall slender young men, one blond and the other dark, each of them with a hand in one pocket as though holding a weapon.

"We are Time Police," the dark one said, "from the Twenty-fifth Century. We have come to punish you for the illegal use of a time machine."

"B-b-but," Weaver sputtered, "I haven't made any bets yet."

"That is true," the blond young man said. "And when we find any inventor of a time machine using it to win at any form of gambling, we give him warning the first time. But we've traced you back and found out that your very first use of the time machine was to steal money from a store. And that is a crime in any century."

The Time Policeman took from his pocket something that looked vaguely like a pistol.

Eustace Weaver took a step backward. "Y-you don't mean—"

"I do mean," said the blond young man, pulling the trigger.

Eustace Weaver's time had run out.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**NIGEL MORLAND**
TITLE:	***All in the Night's Work***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Constable Gill
LOCALE:	London
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Nothing unusual ever happened on Constable Gill's beat—until that midsummer night on aristocratic Hertford Street . . . Now observe a London bobby at work.*

CONSTABLE GILL STOOD ON THE corner of Curzon Street, peacefully surveying the quietness of the midsummer night—and in the comparative backwater of Mayfair, London can be very quiet indeed.

Younger constables might have sneered as Gill rocked slowly in that time-honored motion beloved of some policemen. But Gill would not have minded; he was an old-fashioned man who clung faithfully to a drooping, curtain mustache which went well with a large and corpulent body. If he could serve as the cartoonist's idea of a uniformed policeman, he also epitomized the Metropolitan Police.

There was nothing to attract his attention. He resumed his steady beat, moving in complete silence. His large hand tested shop doors as he passed, considerately ruffled the heads of occasional cats on their night journeys, but all the time his right hand was free to switch on the beam of the powerful Wootton lamp attached to his belt —if emergency should require it. As usual, nothing did happen and he moved under the arch into a small and deserted square.

Gill was due to make his point with his opposite number at the north end of the next street and this he did at a punctual ten min-

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utes after the hour, nodding amiably when Cowley appeared out of the murk.

"Ah, Tom. Anything doing?"

"No, sir."

"Here!" Gill dug the younger man's ribs. "You know you don't 'sir' anybody under an Inspector, and *that* I never shall be."

"Sorry, Gill." Cowley rubbed his chin, grinning. He was still a probationer with another year to serve. Gill's gray hair and air of mature experience had fooled him again, as it fooled many of the younger men. "See you an Inspector yet, Gill."

The big constable chuckled.

"Pension in three years, son. I've seen everything and done everything, just by staying on the beat." He sighed faintly. "Not that I haven't an ambition. Like putting one over on Mr. Dane, for instance —not that I'll ever have the luck."

"Dane of the C.I.D.? Cocky, he is, don't you think?"

"Now, son. A clever rookie doesn't have opinions like that, not if he wants to get on." Gill winked amiably. "Everything quiet?"

Cowley grinned and retailed some events which seemed important to him. These Gill put in their proper place with the ready kindness he always gave to new recruits. Cowley was briefed regarding empty houses on the second half of his beat, then Gill headed toward Park Lane, the border of his own beat.

Halfway along Hertford Street the door of a large house suddenly opened and a man appeared on the porch. He stepped forward at the sight of Gill, and began to chatter hurriedly.

"You gave me a start, Officer. I was just coming out to find you."

"Ah, sir?" Gill's large, bovine face wore a mask of professional blankness that was intended to convey his helpful impartiality. "Anything wrong, sir?"

"Yes, I'm afraid there is." The man glanced at the constable's steady blue eyes, shifting in that embarrassed fashion typical of Londoners when they seek official help. "My friend inside . . . it's dreadful . . ."

"I see, sir. Want me to come in?"

"Yes, please." The man stepped back into the bright hallway. "I can't very well stop you, can I?" His little chuckle was a combination of discomfort and a fear of appearing foolish.

"Well, I can't come in unless the householder invites me."

"Oh, I see what you mean. Silly of me—I forgot that an Englishman's home . . . But come in, come in. This way, please."

Gill was led into a bright room where the lights blazed from a central chandelier. The furniture was expensive and in keeping with aristocratic Hertford Street. A small table stood in the middle of the floor, the covers being laid for one. A man sprawled across the white cloth.

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With gentle hands Gill turned the head of the sprawled man sideways, taking care not to disturb anything on the table. He wet one large forefinger and placed it under the man's nose, nodding as he straightened his back.

"'Fraid he's dead, sir."

"Good God!" The other man stepped back with a gesture of horror. "But he was all right only a few minutes ago!"

"Yes, sir. Got a telephone I can use?"

"Yes, this way, please."

Gill followed the man into the hall where the telephone stood behind the door to the basement. He dialed phlegmatically, half smiling at the small, nondescript dog that appeared when the door was opened.

The man patted the dog hurriedly, muttering a friendly, "Down, old boy, down!"

Savile Row Police Station came on the line, and Gill reported briefly. C-Divisional Headquarters thanked him and promised immediate attention.

The dog was pushed away and the door closed behind it, and then Gill returned to the lighted room, taking out his notebook.

"Now, just a few questions, if it's all the same to you, sir."

The man's name was Farrar; he was the owner of the house and had returned after going to a theater with a friend who had missed his dinner—which explained the supper for one.

"Marshall"—Farrar nodded toward the dead man—"wanted some beer. I went downstairs to get him some, but it took a bit of finding. It's a large house and I'm not particularly familiar with the domestic quarters."

"No servants, sir?"

"Yes, but they don't sleep in—you can't get them to do that these days. I'm a bachelor, which explains why I've got any at all."

"I see. Now, about the time of death: I felt the skull when I lifted his head—must've been coshed while you were getting the beer, sir." Gill's eyes strayed to the bottle standing on the table. "If I know this street, there are no exits or entrances except the front doors?"

"Exactly. But you don't think the murderer might still be . . . ?" Farrar broke off.

"Probably, sir." Gill's voice was reassuring. "But I've had my eyes on the hall—not that I can be in two places at once, just the same. It'll be taken care of in a minute."

Almost immediately after, Inspector Dane was very much in charge. He was a big man, as big as Gill, with a bleak face and rumpled clothes. He spoke with the abruptness sometimes to be found in the Criminal Investigation Department, hearing out Gill's report and expressing his pungent views on the constable's failure to search the house.

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Then he waved the wooden-faced Gill to the unimportant task of guarding the door of the murder room.

The divisional surgeon arrived next, grumbling at being dragged from his bed. His examination was swift and expert.

"Usual blunt instrument. The occiput's crushed like an eggshell—must've been a heavy blow."

"Dead, eh?"

"Yes, he's dead." The doctor sighed but made no remark, knowing perfectly well the police cannot regard a corpse, even if it were cut into sections, as officially dead until the physician says so.

"Thank you, Doctor. How long's he been dead?"

"Always confusing me with a magician, aren't you? I can't say, but the body's still warm. Taking a long guess, you might say thirty minutes or so, but don't try and hold me to that. And don't call me again tonight, if you can help it, there's a good chap."

A brisk handshake and the doctor was gone.

When the experts had finished taking their photographs and fingerprint dustings, Inspector Dane was in a bad temper. He resented Gill's humble but deft twist of the tables when Gill said the burglar could have hidden himself all the time the police were there, and possibly got out by way of the roof at his leisure—a probability strengthened by the finding of a desk with a broken lock on the top floor.

Farrar was brought in to explain the desk.

"There might have been somebody in the house all the time," Dane admitted ungraciously; he was inclined to overlook details himself, expecting his underlings to see to things without orders. "Was anything of value kept in the desk?"

"There was!" Farrar swallowed. "There's a secret drawer where I put a diamond I bought for—well, a lady friend." He hesitated uncomfortably. "Paid nine thousand pounds for it."

Dane gasped and, without even pausing to wonder at the extravagance of rich bachelors, took Farrar upstairs to make sure the diamond was really gone, suggesting, in his opinion, that the burglar might have found a hiding place when he was surprised by the arrival of Farrar and Marshall, realized he was caught when Marshall proposed to eat, used his cosh, and then had gone upstairs while Farrar was in the basement. The roof, Dane added, might have been an exit route.

Gill came to life immediately the door closed. He made a small noise to express his opinion of Dane. Though the uniform branch and the C.I.D. work well together, there are exceptions, and in Gill's opinion Dane was one of them.

Moving quietly, Gill went to the

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little table and studied the cutlery. With deft movements unexpected in one of his size, he next examined the dead man's hands. Then he opened Marshall's jacket and carefully scrutinized the edges of his trouser pockets.

By the time Dane returned, Gill was standing impassively by the door, his face blankly empty.

Dane was now in a really bad temper. He was due to go on his annual leave the next day, but this murder looked as if it would keep him in town: the Force was under strength and Dane knew perfectly well that Central Headquarters would have a lot to say if he did not defer his holiday.

The obvious thing to do was to check with modus operandi files for that rare offender, a burglar who would not hesitate to use a cosh, and use it savagely. Dane called his Sergeant and sent him off to New Scotland Yard to deal with the chore.

Gill stepped forward, standing rigidly at attention, and cleared his throat.

"Sir, if I might make a suggestion."

"What?" Dane turned from his contemplation of the uninteresting contents of Marshall's pockets. "Not now, Constable. I'm busy. Talk to your Sergeant about it, and I think you'd better go back to your beat. Here, give me your book."

Dane initialed the notebook where Gill had described his departure from routine and the reason for it.

In the hallway Gill passed the time of the day with a man from his division who was guarding the front door. The little dog was there as well and came up to be fondled, rolling on its back in an absurdly puppyish fashion. Gill gently rubbed the proffered stomach and said good night to the man at the door.

When he resumed his march along Hertford Street, he was chuckling softly. Dane had always disliked him, but that was no ordeal. Gill had all the stubborn independence of the native Londoner, so he was quite disinterested if his opinions were not welcomed, especially by a superior.

When he returned to Savile Row at 3:30 a.m., his tour of duty finished, Gill reported his round in the Night Occurrence Book, gave a cheery farewell to the Desk Sergeant, and went down the station steps, slipping off his duty armband as he headed toward his small flat at the back of Beak Street, a hundred yards away.

Mrs. Gill, as stout and kindly as her husband, stirred when he came into the bedroom to change swiftly into civilian clothes. She woke up as the door re-opened.

"Now, John! You're not going out again, surely, man?"

Gill nodded.

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"Sorry, dearie. Duty calls, as they say." His voice was more natural and his vowels broader in his own home. "Been a murder on my perishing beat. Old Dane went all sniffy when I tried to give him a tip."

"Him! Stuck-up pig!" Mrs. Gill shook her gray braids. "If you're going to put him in his place, off you go, John, and good luck. But see you take care, there's a lamb."

The summer sky was lightening as Gill moved quickly toward Hertford Street, taking care to avoid his mates and consequent, time-wasting gossip.

There was an empty shop close to Farrar's house, and Gill secreted himself in its sheltering doorway. He knew Dane was a slow worker, and he was not surprised when the Inspector came out thirty minutes later and drove away in a divisional car.

Gill waited patiently. At one time he was compelled to walk briskly into a neighboring street when his section relief appeared, walking his beat; but he still managed to keep the Farrar house in view.

At precisely 6:00 a.m., Farrar came out carrying a suitcase, and this initiated a problem. No matter what the story books say, it is impossible to shadow a man in deserted streets that are bright.

Gill solved it neatly by haling a milk delivery van, backing this with production of his warrant card, and appealing for help.

The driver was reluctant to abandon his round, but the romantic possibilities of a police chase overwhelmed his sense of duty.

Gill climbed to the seat beside the driver, secure in the comforting knowledge that a private car would probably have been too obvious for shadowing purposes; but tradesmen's vans could do the most erratic things and get away with them.

Farrar had only reached the end of Hertford Street when they moved off. As they turned into Park Lane, Farrar hailed a taxi; the milk van moved up and was following close behind on a short journey that led through the clean bright streets and ended in the courtyard of Victoria Station.

Gill's face was impassive as he left his temporary assistant and followed Farrar into the main waiting room of the great terminus. He watched the man buy a ticket and walk toward the departure platforms.

According to the time indicator before which Farrar paused, there was a train leaving for the coast in exactly ten minutes. Gill moved a little more quickly toward the entrance barrier, but it was no good taking foolish chances. Not until Farrar's ticket was actually held out to the collector did Gill's large hand grip the man's arm.

"Mind coming over here, sir? I'd like a word with you."

Farrar started violently and be-

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gan to protest, then became curiously silent as he recognized the calm, bovine face, even though it looked startlingly commonplace without the distinguishing helmet.

Beyond the hearing of the interested ticket collector, Gill recited the formula of arrest, producing his warrant card at the same time.

Farrar's "All right, it's a cop" was reassuring to Gill, but the constable spent a miserable fifteen minutes on the way back to Savile Row. He was taking a very long chance indeed, and if he had made a mistake, dismissal and damnation would be his inevitable reward; nor was it any consolation to know that he had added to his probable enormities by making an arrest on railway property, which is private, and without seeking the cooperation of the Railway Police.

The Desk Sergeant at Savile Row station gasped audibly as Gill brought in the white-faced Farrar. Like a good policeman he listened unemotionally to the charge, writing stolidly in the Day Occurrence Book, but becoming human after the prisoner had been sent to the detention cells.

"You haven't half been up to something, Gill—in civvies and all!"

"Yes, Sergeant. But I've got my uniform trousers on." He pointed hopefully to his legs, and the Sergeant groaned aloud.

"Wearing your uniform for your private pleasures! You'll get it in the neck all right, particularly if you've made a bloomer and pinched a respectable citizen. You're out of your mind, Gill!" He sucked a hollow tooth with a sound of enjoyment. "Probably burn you at the stake, they will, chum!"

The station Inspector was informed, and, grave-faced, he telephoned Inspector Dane, who arrived forty minutes later, torn between fury at his lost sleep and rage at the apparent madness of Constable Gill.

He listened without comment to the story, then went to see Farrar, leaving Gill in a state of morbid depression which did not lift, even when Dane returned in a baffled mood.

"So you *were* right!" His voice rasped like a file on metal. "Farrar's fingerprints check. Central's just phoned verification that he's Markey Bankan!"

Bankan? Something seemed to snap in Gill's anxious mind: Bankan, one of the cleverest rogues in the business who was also that rarity among criminals, an educated man with a brain and a sense of humor, who took a special delight in cat-and-mouse games with the police.

"So-o, you're a detective, eh?" Dane's tones were acrimonious. "Perhaps you'll enlighten me how you deduced all this so brilliantly, Gill, *and* without sanction of *Police Law* which, I imagine, you may

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have heard of a bit in your time?"

"Yes, sir." The big constable writhed, but discipline held back the obvious retort. "I was a bit curious and took a look at the dead man when you were out of the room, sir. He'd fallen on the table —but the bottle of beer close to his head wasn't disturbed."

"Well?"

"It was a flimsy sort of table, sir. The beer ought to have . . ." Gill paused.

Dane glanced across the room at the silent station Inspector, present as routine required in such cases.

"That seems remarkably casual evidence—which I had noticed myself." And then Dane added in a withering voice, "Not that it was important, considering the fact that Farrar, as he calls himself, admitted he went for the beer and found the man dead when he returned with it."

The great wave of scarlet receded a trifle from Gill's face, leaving it almost gaunt.

"Yes, sir."

"Carry on, Mastermind." Dane leaned back smugly. "I daresay there's more to this Sherlock Holmes business than just that?"

"Y-yes, sir. The table was laid for a left-handed man. Just for confirmation I looked at the dead man's trouser pockets—the edge of the right one was worn more than the left, which meant he was a right-handed man." Gill swallowed; the evidence still seemed terribly unconvincing. "Farrar coshed the other chap and killed him, and then set the table for his alibi—you'll have noticed Farrar is left-handed?"

"H'm. Well, I have to admit that our prisoner told me the dead man is Farrar, the real Farrar."

Gill cheered up at the faint softening in Dane's voice.

"I didn't know that, sir. Well, as I saw it, he arranged the corpse to fit his story in case anything went wrong, which it did—meaning his meeting me on the doorstep."

"I see." Dane looked Gill slowly up and down. "Sheer gambling from beginning to end, and you're damned lucky, Constable. Bankan, as we should call him, was after the diamond. He was slightly acquainted with the real Farrar—oh, you can guess the plot."

"Yes, sir." Gill's face was red again. "There was something else, too, sir."

"Indeed? I seem to be learning things. And what else was there?"

"The little dog—Bankan made a fuss over it while I was telephoning. It was a friendly little dog, sir, and he pretended it was his to keep up the illusion of being the true householder."

"You seem to make the oddest deductions, Constable."

"Yes, sir. The way he behaved, it was all so very natural that I never had any doubts that he was Farrar—and yet . . ."

Dane was growing bored. "Have

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'ou another stunning revelation ıp your sleeve?"

"Not—not exactly, sir. I talked o the little dog on the way back to ny beat. That's when I decided I ıught to do something, you being oo busy for my silly ideas, sir."

"You've exceeded your duties, ıut perhaps I merit the reprimand. 'll speak for you, though you lon't deserve it." Dane's voice was ıot unkind because he was a reasonably fair-minded man, but he could not hide an edge of sarcasm as he added, "And what did the dog have to say?"

"Oh, it didn't *speak*, sir. But Bankan said, 'Down, old boy, down' when I was telephoning. It was a little female dog, you see, sir . . ."

The station Inspector could hold it no longer. His stifled chuckle became outright laughter.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**CORNELL WOOLRICH**
TITLE:	***Hot Water***
TYPE:	Detective-Crime Story
DETECTIVE:	Shad (short for Shadow)
LOCALES:	California and Mexico
TIME:	About 1935
COMMENTS:	*Fay North was a famous movie star who had one weakness: she was crazy for gambling —and she never won. Here's what happened at Agua Caliente one wild and woolly week end, as told by her faithful bodyguard.*

HOT WATER IS TWO THINGS. IN slang it means getting into trouble; in geography it means a gambling joint just across the California state-line in Mexico. Agua Caliente means hot water in Spanish. It means both kinds to yours truly, after what happened that time. I never want to hear the name again.

Ten o'clock Friday night, and all is quiet in Fay North's forty rooms and swimming pool, out in Beverly Hills. Fay has just finished a picture that afternoon and has said something about going to bed early and sleeping until next Tuesday. I have been all around, upstairs and down, seeing that the doors and windows are all locked and that the electric burglar alarm is in working order, and I am in my own room just off the main entrance, peeling to pajamas and ready to pound the ear, when there is a knock at my door. It is the butler.

"Miss North has changed her mind," he announces; "she is spending the week end at Agua Caliente. Please be ready in ten minutes."

I am not asked to go, you notice, I am told I *am* going. That is part of my job. Miss North parts with a generous helping of her salary each week, in my direction, and it is up to me to stick close and see that no bodily harm comes to her.

It really isn't an unpleasant job

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for this reason: on the screen Miss North has become famous for playing tough, rowdy characters, but in real life she isn't like that at all. She doesn't drink, doesn't smoke, and never goes to parties or even night clubs; so all I really have to do is ride back and forth to work with her and shoo salesmen and newspaper guys away from the door.

But she has one great weakness: she is crazy for gambling. She never wins, but that doesn't seem to stop her. I feel sorry for her, but it is her money and none of my business what she does with it.

Anyway, she has stayed away from Agua for some time now, after dropping so much there the last time; so she is entitled to blow off steam, I guess, after working so hard. I shake my head about all the good sleep I'm going to miss, but I sling on my shoulder-holster, pack a couple of clean shirts, and go out and wait for her in the car without saying a word. A plane would get us there quicker, but that is another thing about Fay: she won't get in one, so it means we have to drive all night to be there when the border opens at nine.

Well, she comes out of the house in about five or ten minutes and it seems just the three of us are going —her, me and the driver. For once she is giving Timothy the slip. He is her manager and a very good one, too, but he raised Cain about her losses the last time he was down there with her, and I guess she doesn't want him around to rub it in. He doesn't like the place anyway, doesn't think it's safe for her to go down there carrying so much money. She has brought several big bags with her, enough to stay for a month, but I guess that is because she is a woman and you have to dress up down there. She gets in back and away we go.

"Well, Shad," she says, "I guess you could kill me for this."

"No, ma'm," I say, "you haven't had a day off in quite some stretch."

Shad isn't my name, but she calls me that because when I was new on the job she got the habit of speaking about me as her Shadow.

"Timothy doesn't need to find out," she says. "We'll be back by Monday morning, and if he calls up tomorrow I told the butler to say I have a bad headache and can't come to the phone."

It doesn't sound to me like that is very wise; Timothy might come over twice as quick if he thinks anything is the matter with her, on account of she is such an important investment; but she doesn't ask for my opinion, so I keep it to myself.

Then she says, "This time I can't lose! I'll show him when I come back whether I'm jinxed or not, like he always says. I'll make up all my losses, because I know now just what to do. I consulted an astrologer in my dressing-room during lunch today, and she gave me a

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grand tip. I'm dying to see if it'll work or not."

First-off I figure she means just another new system; every time we go down there she has a new system, none of which ever works; but later I'm to find out it isn't that at all.

The funny part of it is that with me it's just the other way around: I don't give a rap about betting or games of chance—in fact, don't believe in it at all; but I never yet chucked down four bits or a dollar on any kind of a table at all without it collected everyone else's dough like flypaper and swept the board clean. So then I always picked the nearest sucker with a long face and made him a present of the whole wad—minus the original buck, of course—and he went right back and lost it. The wages I get from Miss North are enough for me; I'm no hog.

Well, we drive all night, pass through San Diego about seven in the morning, and roll up to the bridge across the Mexican border just as they're getting ready to open it for the day. Miss North only has to show her face and we clear it, only as usual one of the guardsmen can't resist hollering after us, "Drop around, don't be bashful!" which is the catch-phrase from one of her pictures. She's so used to hearing it she just smiles.

After that comes a sandy stretch with a lot of cactus, and then flowers, fountains, and a lot of chicken-wire architecture show up, and that's Agua. Miss North engages her usual layout and signs the book "Peggy Peabody" or something, to fool any reporters that may be hanging around.

Everybody always stays up all night down there, but I suppose she has to have some place to powder her nose in and change clothes between losses. Anyway, I see to it that I have an adjoining room with a communicating door between. Then we separate to scrape off some of the desert, and in a little while she knocks on the side door.

"You're armed," she says, "so maybe you better take care of this for me until tonight," and she hands me a little two-by-four black toilet-case with her initials on it in gold. "I'm so absent-minded I'm liable to mislay it just when I need it—"

Well, I'm just nosey enough to snap the latch and look in it—it isn't even locked, mind you!

"It's the stake for tonight," she smiles sweetly. "Fifteen thousand. I didn't bring much along this time because I'm so sure of winning."

"But, Miss North," I groan, "carrying it around like this—"

"Yes, don't you think that's clever of me?" she agrees. "I just dumped out all the gold toilet articles. No one would think of looking in there." Then she says, "See you later," closes the door, and

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eaves me to do the worrying about t.

Well, the first thing I decide is, t don't stay in that beauty-kit vhich hasn't even got a key to it. No matter where it goes, it gets out of there. So I empty it out—it's all icketed just the way the bank gave it to her—stack it neatly inside a big, roomy envelope, seal it, write ier name on the outside, and take t down to the manager's office.

"Put this in your safe," I say 'and keep it there until Miss North or me calls for it when the session opens tonight."

"If her luck," he grins, "is what t usually is, she might just as well not bother taking it out, because it vill only come right straight back n again." Then he takes out a fat oundle of vouchers and tells me not o bother Miss North's head about t, but don't I think maybe she'd ike to clear them up and start vith a clean slate before she starts olunging again the next few nights?

"But Timothy paid up everything she owed you people, right after she was down here the last ime, and that's over two months go," I object. "I heard him hollering, that's how I happen to know. Lemme see the dates on some of hose."

Well, some are only from the veek end before, and all of them re later than the last time she was here.

"There's somebody been down here impersonating her," I warn him, "and getting credit from you. You better warn your bankers and notify the police."

His face drops and he tells me, "I never know when she is here and when she isn't. She always stops off under an alias anyway. Well, I can't afford to attract attention to a thing like this—it would stop the picture people from coming here; so we'll just have to forget about these, and I'll tip off my staff not to let it happen in future."

And he tears the whole lot of them up and dribbles them into the wastebasket. Most of them were only for medium-sized amounts anyway (which is another reason I know they're not Fay's), but it just goes to show there are some regular guys, even in his business.

She comes downstairs after a while, but I don't tell her about it, because she's down here to relax, in the first place; and in the second, it's Timothy's look-out, not hers, and everybody in her business has this impersonating stunt pulled on them at one time or another. It's nothing new.

She's wearing smoked glasses to keep from being recognized; but then, almost everybody else around is, too, so it don't mean much.

Well, we spent a quiet afternoon, me tagging after her while she strolls and buys picture postcards; and then at five she goes back to her room to get ready for the fire-

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works, telling me I can eat downstairs, but she's going to eat alone, up in her room.

Now, here's where the first mistake comes in. I have a right to stick with her, even if I have to eat outside her room door; but I figure everything's under control, that she's safer here than she would be in her own home, that I'm right down at the foot of the stairs if she needs me, and that she'll be down again as soon as she's through dressing.

So I sit me down in the big patio dining-room, and I tear a sirloin at four bucks a throw (not Mex, either). After a while the dancing quits and the stars—I mean the ones in the sky—show and the big gambling rooms light up, and things get right down to business.

And still no sign of her. I know I haven't missed her, because I'm right on a line with the stairs and she'd have to pass me on her way in. So I dunk my cigarette and I go up to see what's keeping her.

Well, it seems I pick just the right time for it; a minute later and I wouldn't have seen what I did; a minute sooner and I wouldn't have either.

Just as I get to the top of the stairs and turn down the corridor leading to her room and mine, I catch a strange dame in the act of easing out of *my* door. She didn't get in by mistake either—one look at the way she's tiptoeing out tells me that. "Oho," I say to myself, "a hotel rat—or rather, a casino rat, eh?"

Well, I want to see what she's up to and find out who she's working with, if possible; so instead of giving myself away I quickly step back onto the stair-landing and lean over the railing as though I am watching what was going on below. Her head was turned the other way, so I know she hasn't spotted me. She thinks the coast is clear.

She closes the door carefully after her and comes hurrying along toward where I am. I turn around slowly and size her up. She is a tough-looking little customer, with jet-black hair and layers of paint all over her map that you could scrape off with a spoon. She is dressed like a dance-hall girl, too—or like what people that never saw one think they are like—only personally I never met one that was such a dead give-away. In fact, I wonder how she ever got into such a ritzy place with such a get-up.

She's got a red shirtwaist on, and a yellow and black checked skirt, that hurts your eyes, only it misses her knees by a mile. But what interests me mostly is that in one hand she is hanging onto that toilet-case that Fay turned over to me when we got in. I know it by the gold initials on it.

She has lifted it from my room without bothering to find out if it still has the money in it or not; maybe on account of Fay being

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right next door, she didn't have time. It is easy to see, though, that she must have overheard Fay tell me what was in it earlier in the day; that's how she knew what to go for. Probably eavesdropped outside our doors.

Well, she brushes by me close enough for me to touch her. She doesn't look at me at all, and I don't raise a finger to stop her.

It may sound funny, my not jumping on her when she is right at my fingertips like that; but the reason is I happen to know there is no money in that toilet-case. And as I said before, I would like to see if she has a shill working with her, and where she is heading for with what she thinks she has. Besides, a slippery staircase is no place to tangle with the kind of a customer she looks to be like; the casino bouncers are down below, and she is going down there anyway.

So I let her get two steps ahead of me, and then I turn and start down myself, as if I just remembered something that required my presence below. And I have one hand loose, ready to collar her if she tries to break and run for it.

But she doesn't; instead, she slows up and takes her time, not hurrying any more, like when she first came out of the room. I can see that she is going to try to bluff it out.

She swaggers along real tough, and everyone is turning around to look at her. Then, when she gets down to the bottom, she happens to pass a guy with a cigarette stuck in his mouth—and doesn't she reach out and calmly take it away and start puffing it herself without even a thank-you!

She passes by the main entrance without a look, and heads straight for the big gambling room, cool as a cucumber.

"Well," I say to myself, "if this don't beat everything for sheer, unadulterated nerve!" Instead of ducking, she is going to hang around the premises a while and try her luck with money that she just lifted, which is so hot that smoke ought to be coming out of that case she is carrying this very minute—if it happened to have anything in it. All I ask is just one look at her face when she opens it and finds out what her haul is worth; maybe that will take some of the swagger out of her.

In I go after her, and I buttonhole the nearest bouncer.

"Send for the cops," I say, "I'm going to present you with a pinch in just about thirty seconds. Camille, over there, squeezing her way to the middle roulette table—keep your eye on her." And I tell him what she's done.

He sends out for the *policia* and also sends for the manager, and then him and me and the other bouncer close in on her and get ready to pounce when I give the signal. But first I want to get a load of her disappointment.

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Well, they're as thick as thieves around that table—two or three deep—but that hasn't stopped her; she used both elbows, both hips, and her chin, and blasted her way through to the baize. We can't get in that far; all we can see is her back.

"Wait a minute," I motion them, "she'll be right out again—into our arms. She hasn't anything to play with."

You can hear the banker say, "Place your bets," and "Bank is closed." Then the clicking of the little ball as the wheel goes spinning around. Not another sound for a minute. Then a big *"Ooh!"* goes up from everyone at once.

"Killing," says the bouncer, knowingly.

"Wonder what's delaying her?" I say. "She ought to have found out by now. Maybe she's picking people's pockets—"

The same thing happened a second time; a big long *"Ooh!"* sounds like a foghorn.

The manager shows up, and I tell him the story out of the corner of my mouth. "—caught her in the act and followed her down here. But all she got was the empty kit," I snicker.

"That's what *you* think," he squelches. "I got my doubts! A voice on the wire, claiming to be Fay North, asked me to turn back that envelope less than ten minutes ago. I took it up to the room myself—"

"Did you see her take it from you?" I ask excitedly.

"No, that's why I think something's fishy. An arm reached out from the room, but she stayed behind the door. Claimed she was dressing."

"Good Gawd!" I moan. "And you turned over fifteen grand like that without—"

"You told me North or you would claim it. The call came from 210—that's her room, I checked it with the switchboard operator."

"That's *my* room!" I tell him. "North's is 211. This phony was in there—I saw her coming out. C'mon! We've wasted enough time. The hell with the payoff."

The Mex police had come in by now, two of them, both higher-ups, this being the casino. The manager and the bouncers shoo everyone aside, the crowd falls back, and we get a good look at what has been going on. The phony is left standing there all alone. But she is so taken up she never even notices. And she has the fifteen thou all right. Or at least she had it to start with; now she must have two or three times that. In fact, everything in sight is piled up in front of her, nearly chin-high.

Her system, it seems, has been to blow the bills she bets with her breath, like handfuls of leaves, letting them land wherever they want to on the number mat. The banker is green in the face.

The manager taps her on the

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shoulder. "You're under arrest."

The Mex line up one on each side of her. She's hard-boiled all right, like I knew she would be.

"Run along and fly a kite for yourself. Can't you see I'm busy?"

I stoop down and pick up the toilet-kit, which she has kicked under the table. I shake it in her face.

"This belongs to Fay North. I saw you coming out of my room with it. Now, are you going to come clean or are you going to see the inside of a Mexican jail?"

Well, she keeps looking me in the eye and looking me in the eye like she wanted to say something; and then she looks at all the winnings piled up on the table like she was afraid of something, and she just shuts up like a clam.

For a minute I almost have a crazy idea that maybe it *is* Fay herself, under a heavy character make-up, only just then I turn my head and I see the real Fay come sweeping in the doorway like a queen, heading for one of the smaller side-tables.

"Hold on," I say, "she'll tell me in a jiffy. If it was just the empty kit this one lifted, you can turn her loose for my part, but if she phoned down for that money she goes to jail, dame or no dame."

I run over and stop Fay and say to her, "Miss North, did you call down a while ago for that money the manager was holding for you?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," she says, and gives me an unpleasant look through her smoked glasses. "Don't put me in a bad mood now. Can't you see I'm on my way to the table? Please stay away from me, I got to have quiet to concentrate—"

I go back to them and say, "Okay, off she goes!"

"Why you—!" she blazes at me, but she doesn't get any further. The two Mex lieutenants drag her out backward by the shoulders, kicking like a steer, and there's quite a commotion for a minute; then the place settles down again, and that's that. Since neither me nor the manager can talk the native lingo, one of the bouncers goes along with them to prefer the charges and see she's booked right.

Well, I'm afraid to go too near Fay, on account of she seems to be in a cranky humor and asked me not to distract her; so I sit down just inside the door where I can watch her and be the perfect bodyguard, without getting in her hair. She sure looks spiffy in her gold dress, but she keeps the smoked panes on even while she's playing. She has the usual luck and runs out of the fifteen thou, which the house turned back to her, in no time flat.

Then she starts unloading I.O.U.'s, and they come over to me to make sure there won't be any mistake like there was before; but I tell them to go ahead and honor

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them, it's the real McCoy this time.

About the time she's another four or five in the red, a houseboy comes in with a message for her and she quits and goes out after him. I get up to follow her, and she gives me a dirty look over her shoulder, so I change my mind and sit down again, saying to myself, "Gee, I never saw her as snappish as this before!"

But my equilibrium has hardly touched the chair once more when there comes a whale of a scream from just outside the casino entrance. Then another, which chokes off in the middle like a hand was clapped over the screamer's mouth. Then there's a shot, and the sound of a big eight-cylinder job roaring away from in front of the place with its throttle wide open.

By that time the chair is rooms behind me and I'm tearing out the entrance with my own loudspeaker in my hand. There's nothing to shoot at but a little winking red tail-light which is already clear of the casino grounds and just as I fire at it, it goes out, not because I hit it but because it's too far away to see any more. The porter is sitting on the front steps holding onto his shoulder for dear life, and one of her gold slippers which fell off when she was thrown in is lying there in the roadway.

There is also a scrap of paper a considerable distance away which they must have tossed behind them. I snatch it up as I dash for the garage where Fay's own car is bedded.

The driver is knee-deep in a crap game, but luckily it is going on right inside the tonneau itself, so I just leap in at the wheel and bring the whole works out with me in reverse. He hangs on, but his three partners fall out; also one of the garage doors comes off its hinges, and almost all the paint gets shaved off that side the car.

Once out it would take too much time to turn it all the way around, so I just make a dive through the casino flower beds and the wheels send up a spray of rose petals and whatnot.

The casino steps are seething with people and I yell back, "Notify the border! They may try to double back and get across with her—" but I don't know whether they hear me or not.

As for notifying the Mex police, what could they do, chase the kidnap car on donkeys?

"Snatched!" I tell the driver. "Right out of the doorway in front of everybody! I'll never be able to look anyone in the eye again if we don't head them off before this gets out. Reach over and grab the wheel."

He's been *tequila-ing,* but at least he knows what he's doing. He leans across my shoulders, I duck out of the way, and he hauls his freight over into the front seat. I give it the lights, and night turns into day ahead of us.

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"Got gas?"

"Thank Gawd!" he says. "I filled her up when we checked in, to get it off my mind."

We finally get out of the grounds, and he tries to take the road to Tia-juana and the border.

"Left!" I tell him. "Left! They went the other way—I saw them turn."

"But there's not even a road that way—nothing, just desert—not a gas station from here to Mexicali! We'll get stalled sure as—"

"Never mind the geography les-son," I tell him. "Don't forget, they're not running on maple syrup either."

The asphalt doesn't go an inch beyond the resort limits in that direction, and as he says, there isn't even what you could call a road, just a few burro-cart tracks in the soft powdery dust. But one good thing about it, the tire treads of their heavy machine are as easy to pick up as if they'd driven over snow.

As if I had to be told this late what the whole idea is, I take time off to look at the piece of paper I picked up outside the casino.

"Fifty thousand," it says in pen-cil, "gets her back. Notify Timothy in L. A. that the joke is on him—we'll know what we mean. We'll cure her of gambling, also of breathing, if he don't come across."

It is all printed out; evidently it was prepared before they drove up to the casino.

"Americans," I remark to the driver. "You can tell by the way it's worded. It's our fault if we lose 'em—they'll stand out like a sore thumb if they stay on this side of the line."

"Yeah," he agrees, "like a sore thumb with wings; they're making pretty good headway so far!"

That crack in the note about cur-ing her of gambling makes the whole thing look twice as bad to me, because reading between the lines I get this out of it: Timothy must have engineered the snatch as a practical joke to begin with, to throw a scare into her and break her of the habit of running down to Agua and throwing away her money.

But now his hired kidnapers have double-crossed him and turned it into the real thing, seeing a chance to get ten times the stage money he paid them. And if there is anything worse than a snatch, it is a snatch with a double-cross in it.

He knows who they are, and they know he knows; it's sink or swim with them and they won't stop at anything. Poor Fay is liable to come back to her public in little pieces, even after the ransom is paid.

We haven't once caught sight of them so far, even though they can't possibly make it any quicker than we can over a roadbed that con-sists entirely of bumps, ridges, hil-locks, gullies, with scrub growing

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all over the place. And yet the treads of their tires are always there ahead of us in the glare of the headlights, big as life, so I know we're not wrong. The visibility is swell too, everything stands out under the moon, and the ground is white as cornstarch.

It's not the seeing, it's the going that is terrible. One minute the two left wheels are at a forty-five degree angle taking some mound, the next minute it's the two right wheels, and the springs keep going under us the whole time like concertinas.

"Go on," I keep telling him, "get some speed into it. If they can do it, we can! She paid twelve grand for this boat."

"But it's supposed to be used for a c-c-car," he chatters, "not a Rocky Mountain goat. That *tequila* don't go good with all this seesawing, either!"

I take the wheel back from him for a while and give him a chance to pull himself together.

A minute later as we ride a swell that's a little higher than most of the others, I see a red dot no bigger than a pinpoint way off in the distance. In another instant it's gone again as we take a long downgrade, then it shows up just once more, then it goes for good.

"That's them!" I tell him. "They don't even know we're coming after 'em, or they wouldn't leave their lights on like that!"

"They wouldn't dare drive over this muck without any," he groans, holding his stomach with bot hands.

"Watch me close in," I mutte and I shove my foot halfwa through the floor.

Immediately there's a bang like firecracker, and a sharp jagge rock or maybe a dead cactus branc for all I know, has got a front tir We skiver all over before I can ge it under control again.

"That's been coming to us fo the past forty minutes," he say jumping out. He reaches for th spare and I pull his hand away.

"That would only go too. Let' strip them all off and ride the bar rims; the ground's getting harder al all the time."

We get rid of them and we'r under way again in something lik five minutes' time. But that put the others five minutes farthe ahead of us, and the going befor was like floating on lilies com pared to what we now experience The expression having the day lights jolted out of you is puttin it mild. We don't dare talk for fea of biting our tongues in two.

A peculiar little gleam like a pud dle of water shows up a little whil later and when I see what it is stop for a minute to haul it in. It' that gold dress of hers lying ther on the ground.

"Good night!" he says in a scare voice. "They haven't—"

"Naw, not this soon. Not unti they make a stab at the fifty grand," I say grimly. "They probably mad

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her change clothes, that's all, to keep her visibility down once it gets light."

And away we go, him at the wheel once more.

The sky gets blue, morning checks in, and we can cut the lights now. There's still gas, but it's rapidly dwindling.

"All I ask," I jabber, keeping my tongue away from my teeth, "is that theirs goes first. It should, because our tank started from scratch at the casino, they must have used up some of theirs getting to it from across the line. They also got eight cylinders to feed."

A little after six we pass through a Mexican village, their treads showing down its main lane. Also, there is a dead rooster stretched out, with all the neighbors standing around offering sympathy to its owner.

"They left their card here," I say. "Let's ask." We put on the brakes and I make signals to them, using the two Spanish words I know.

"How many were in the car that ran over that hen's husband?" I signal.

They all hold up four fingers.

"Hombres or women?" I want to know.

All men is the answer.

"M'gard!" groans the driver, "Maybe they give it to her and buried her back there where we found the dress!"

"She's still with them," I answer. "They got her into men's clothes, that's all. Or else there are four in the gang and they have her trussed up on the floor."

We have a little trouble starting, because they have all collected around us and seem to want to hold us responsible for the damage. A couple of 'em go home for their *machetes,* which are the axes they chop maguey-plants with.

"We're cops," I high-sign them, "chasing after the first car, which has *bandidos* in it." When they hear that, they send up a big cheer and clear out of the way. Unfortunately, we knock over a chicken ourselves, just as we're pulling out—a hen this time.

"It woulda been a shame to separate them two," says the driver blowing a feather off his lip.

There are no firearms in the village, so we don't slow up to explain.

"Shoulda got water," says the driver.

"We'da got a lot more than water if we waited," I tell him.

It's hot as the devil by nine, and every bone in my body is aching

"We must be way to the east of Mexicali by now," I mention. "What are they going to do, keep going until they hit the Colorado River?"

"They must have some hideout between here and there," he thinks.

"They're looking for one, you mean. They didn't have time to get one ready. It was Timothy who cooked up the thing yesterday

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morning after he found out where she went to. She didn't even know herself she was coming down to Agua until the last thing Friday night—"

At 9:22 by the clock I say, "What're you stopping for?"

"I ain't stopping," he says, "the car is. Maybe you'd care to cast your eye at the gas gauge?"

I don't have to, to know what he means. We're without gas, and in a perfect spot for it, too.

The wheels have hardly stopped turning before the leather seats begin to get hot as stove lids.

"All I need is a pinch of salt," he says, "to be a fried egg. Well, as long as we're not going any place any more, here goes!"

And he hauls a long bottle of *tequila* out of one of the pockets of the car and pulls the cork out with his teeth.

"Hold on!" I say, and I grab it away from him. "How about trying this on the tank, instead of your insides? Maybe it'll run on this—"

I hop out and empty it in. He follows me out with two more bottles.

"I laid in a supply," he says, "for the garage party last night."

"Give it the ignition," I snap, "before it finds out what it's using."

Well, sure enough, the engine turns over on it, and when I get in next to him, it starts to carry us!

"You shoulda bought a kegful," I gloat.

"Anyway," he mourns, "it'll take us to some different place to roast in."

"I can't figure," I'm telling him, "why it hasn't happened to them. They haven't had a chance to fill up since we've been on their tail—"

When suddenly he stops the car, this time of his own accord. "It has!" he says. "There they are—or am I just seeing mileages or whatever they call those things?"

They're so far ahead we can't even see the car; it's just the flash of the sun on chrome that we can make out from way off. But it holds steady in one place, meaning they aren't moving any more they've stopped.

There are three long, gradual, intervening hollows between us and the flash, separated by two medium-sized rises, not high enough to cut it off. But on a line with them, to the left, there is quite an abrupt crag or cone-shaped mound—the highest thing for miles around; its shadow falls the other way, so they're right out in the blazing sun.

"They're stalled," I say, "or they would have gone around it into the shade. Cut way over to the left; if we can put that thing between us and them maybe we can sneak up and get the drop on them."

It isn't the odds that matter; but I keep remembering they have Fay with them, and they are just the kind of rats that if they see us coming they would—

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I know the driver is armed without having to ask—she always insisted that he carry a gun on his person just in case. I replace the shot I fired at them from the casino.

"If they flash like that," he remarks, turning at right-angles to the left, "so do we—they've seen us by now."

"They're facing the sun, and it's behind us," I remind him. "It won't be straight overhead until noon. They can't tell, unless they got energy enough to climb on foot all the way to the top of that crest. I don't think they even know we've lasted this far—"

We keep going in a big wide loop, and the hillock slowly shifts, first to dead center, then on around to the right. The winking flash their car gives off disappears as the crest gets in the way, and now we and they are on the opposite side of it.

"Now we'll close in," I say. "See if we can make the shade, anyway, before we get out of the car."

"You shoulda been a general," he tells me admiringly.

The shade cast by the summit keeps backing away from us, distances being deceptive in that clear air; but finally when the ground has already started to go up, up, it sweeps over us like cool blue ink—and what a relief! I give him the signal to cut.

"We go the rest of the way on our own."

"Aren't you going to use the car for a shield," he says, "if they start firing at us?"

"There isn't going to be that kind of firing. Miss North is right in the middle of them."

We get out and start up to the top on our side, instead of, as he wants, circling around the base. Looking down on them from above will give us a big advantage, I figure; they won't know whether we're a whole posse or just two fellows.

It's a tough climb, too; the hill, which looked so smooth from way off, turns out to be full of big and little boulders, and with a tricky grade to it.

"Everything's under control," he heaves behind me, "except suppose it turns out they just stopped to rest instead of being stalled, and they've gone on while we been doing our mountain-climbing act?"

I don't bother answering—it would take too much breath away from my footwork. If they were just resting, they would rest in the shade, not out in the broiling sun.

We get to the top finally, and I motion his shoulders down, so they won't show against the skyline. Then we both stick our noses over and look. The car, being farther out, comes in sight first—but there is nobody in it or near it.

"Don't tell me they've gone off on the hoof and left it—" he whispers.

"Sh!" I shut him up, and crane

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my neck higher. They're in closer to us, right under the brow of the hill, which is almost perpendicular on their side. Three of them are standing around talking it over, and there's a fourth a few yards away sitting by himself on a boulder.

I nudge the driver and point with my gun. "What d'ye want to bet that's Fay North? He's the only one wearing smoked glasses, like she had on, and the poor guy's barefoot, d'ye notice?" Otherwise the figure has on dungarees, a shirt, and a cap pulled way down on its head.

Well, I have everything doped out beautiful. They haven't seen us yet, so we'll get the drop on them from above, make them reach without having to do any shooting at all, have her frisk them, and then march them ahead of us back to our own car.

So I motion him to edge over along the crest, away from me, so it'll look like there are more of us up here. He's been standing right behind me, gun in hand, looking over my shoulder. He turns to do like I say, and then something happens.

All of a sudden he's flat up against me backwards, pressing as close as he can get and quivering all over like jelly. There's a clatter, and he's dropped his gun. It sounds like a bee or hornet is buzzing around us. He's crowding me so that I can't get out of the way without going over the crest in full view of them, and he has no room to move, badly as he wants to.

I twist and look past him, and aiming out of a cleft between two boulders alongside of us, at about chin-level to him, is a perfect honey of a rattler, coiled in striking position. It's so close to him the weaving of its head almost seems to fan his face—or it looks that way from where I am, anyway.

There's no time to think twice; I whip up my hand and plug three shots into it, close enough to singe the line of his jaw. There's no trouble hitting the thick bedspring coils—I could have almost reached out and touched them if I'd cared for the pleasure.

It strikes with a sort of a flop, but it's dead already, and hangs down like a ribbon. But there goes our chance of surprising them; in a split second we have to topple on our bellies and back off, the way bullets are pinging all over the rocks around us, and sending up squirts of dust. They are certainly quick on the draw, those guys.

The three who were together have shot apart like a busted tomato.

One gets behind a bit of scrub; one gets in closer, where there's a little ledge to protect him. And one doesn't get any place at all; he goes down on his knees as I get rid of my three remaining shots.

The driver has grabbed up his

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gun, and shoved over to the other side to have elbow room. The figure sitting by itself farther out has jumped to its feet and started to run toward the car. I can tell by the way she runs that it is Fay North, just as I thought. But she can't make time on the hot sand in her bare feet.

The one under the ledge suddenly darts out after her before I have finished reloading, and the second one breaks for it too, at the same time; which is what you call teamwork.

The driver gets him the second step he takes, and he slides to a stop on his ear. But the first one has already caught up with her, whirled her around, and is holding her in front of him for a shield. To show us who she is, he knocks the cap off her and all her blonde hair comes tumbling down.

"Hold it, don't shoot!" I warn the driver, but he has sense enough without being told.

The guy starts backing toward the car with her, a step at a time. He's holding one arm twisted painfully behind her back, and you can see his gun gleaming between her elbow, but she's game at that. She screams out to us, "Stop him from getting to that car—he's got a tommy-gun in it!" Then she sort of jolts, as though he hit her from behind.

I burn at that, but there's nothing I can do. But the driver doesn't seem to have that much self-control. He's suddenly flying down the incline almost headfirst, in a shower of little rocks and dust, arms and legs all waving at the same time. But at least not dropping his gun like before. When I see that, I break cover too, but not quite that recklessly, keeping bent double and zigzagging down the slope.

Fay is almost hidden by smoke, the way the guy behind her is blasting away; but I see her suddenly come to life, clap her elbow tight against her ribs, imprisoning his gun and jarring his aim.

He tries to free it, they struggle, and she gets a terrific clout on the jaw for her trouble. It seems impossible the driver didn't get any of that volley, but he keeps going under his own steam, as though he can't stop himself.

Fay is out cold now. We are both almost over to her, but the thug with her is only a yard or two away from the car. He lets both her and the gun go and dives for it. He tears the door open and gets in. I jump over her where she is lying, without stopping, because once he gets his hands on that tommy-gun—

He has his hands on it already but that split second's delay while he is swerving it my way costs him the decision. I tomahawk him between the eyes with the butt of my gun. The tommy goes off spasmodically in the wrong direction and the windshield up front flies in

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pieces; then him and me go down together in the back of the car.

The driver shows up and sort of folds up over the side of the car like a limp rag, head down.

"Gee, that was swell," I tell him when I get my breath back, "the way you rushed him from the top of that hill!"

"Rushed him hell!" he grunts. "I lost my balance and fell."

We truss up the guy in the car, who is all right except that my gun broke his nose; and then we go back to where Fay is sitting up in the sand, looking very bedraggled. Her shoulder is wrenched from the way he had held her, there is a lump on her jaw, and her face is all grimy and dust-streaked. Even so, when we stand her on her feet and she takes off those smoked glasses, him and me both stare at her.

"I know—never mind rubbing it in," she groans. "After this, I'm through passing myself off as Fay North, rubber checks or no rubber checks. What an experience! I'm her stand-in," she explains, limping back to the car. "Same measurements, coloring, and everything. I guess that's what gave me the idea. But all I ask you boys is to pick a nice cool jail for me where the sun never shines—if we ever get back to civilization."

About three o'clock a plane sent out from the casino to look for us sights us and comes down, and the girl and the driver go back in it, but we neither of us say anything about what she has done. I stay there with two cars, two dead snatch-artists and one live one, a pailful of water, and a stack of sandwiches for company; and it's early Monday morning before I'm back in Agua with the rescue party sent out to get me.

She's been let out, of course, but she's standing there waiting for me on the casino steps.

"Gee, Miss North," I mumble, "how was I to know—?"

She shakes her finger at me and says, "Now don't try to act modest. You knew what you were doing, and I think it was simply wonderful of you! That was my new system, of course. Remember, I told you I consulted an astrologer the day we left Hollywood. She told me the trouble with my betting was I had the wrong aura! I was too blonde and refined. She said if I'd send out tough brunette vibrations my luck would change. Of course I couldn't tell you, because that would have broken my winning streak."

"Then you're not sore?"

"Sore? Why it was wonderful of you Shad, the way you put me in jail to save me from being kidnaped. Such foresight—such cleverness! And I'm through with Timothy for trying such a thing on me. You're my business manager from now on—and I won't take no for an answer!"

As long as she won't, I don't try to say it.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Number 21 in our series of "first stories" . . . It is the exception that proves the rule, and Jeraldine Davis' "Grownups Sure Are Funny" is a case in point. Although the author's theme is a dangerous one, she handles it with remarkable delicacy—indeed, Mrs. Davis' control of her material and the discipline of her writing are amazing in a "first story." Here is a newcomer with a perception and sensitivity that many old "pros" will envy . . .

Mrs. Davis is in her mid-thirties. She was graduated in 1947 from the University of Colorado where she majored in philosophy and English (always an excellent combination for would-be writers). At the time we accepted her "first story," she was earning her livelihood by running a small secretarial service in Houston, Texas.

We predict a bright future for Jeraldine Davis—if only she continues to write . . .

GROWNUPS SURE ARE FUNNY

by JERALDINE DAVIS

I SAT IN THE BIG LEATHER CHAIR IN daddy's study. He sat at daddy's desk. He said he was a policeman, but he didn't look like one. He didn't have on a uniform or anything —you know, the kind with shiny buttons and stars. He wore a plain suit like daddy does. He was sort of thin like maybe he didn't get enough to eat and he looked tired like he didn't get too much sleep. His eyes were brown and sort of sad and he wore just a plain hat pushed to the back of his head.

He asked me my name which is Jenny and how old I am. I told him nine, but I'll be ten next week. He asked me how I got along at school, and I told him I always go away to school but that I make very good grades, which is true and I am not just bragging.

He said to tell him all about myself. I started twisting one of my braids. I guess it's because I get nervous and I didn't know quite what to say. He looked at me for a minute, waiting, and then he said, "Do you remember when your mother had the accident in the car?"

That was a long time ago and I was away at school. Daddy told me that Mama had been hurt in a car accident and would never walk any more, that I must not ever bother

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her but try to help her. It made me sad to see Mama because she was so sad. I guess it was because she used to be a dancer and now she couldn't dance any more.

When I first came home, Mama had a nurse, but she went away in a little while. I used to go in and see Mama, but when she wasn't asleep she'd say, "Go away, Jenny. Go and play." Sometimes I'd go for a walk with Midget, that's my dog. And sometimes I'd go and look through daddy's microscope—that one over by the window, but daddy said I shouldn't play with his things. Mostly now, I play in the cellar.

The policeman listened, but he didn't say anything. I like to talk to grownups but they hardly ever have time and I don't believe they really listen. The policeman did though.

He said, "Tell me about the day your mama fell down the cellar steps. Tell me from the time you first got up."

I started biting my fingernails. I always do when I am trying to think real hard, but the policeman didn't say anything and I decided I sort of like him. Everybody I know scolds me when I bite my fingernails.

I remember it was Wednesday because it was Martha's day off. Martha is our housekeeper. I went to my mother's room. Daddy told me even if Mama said to just go away and play, I was to go in and see her every day. I didn't knock because I thought maybe she was asleep. I just went in real quiet.

Mama wasn't in bed. She was standing up by the window looking out. Her wheel chair was next to her bed. I guess I was real surprised because I knew Mama couldn't walk. I couldn't figure out how she had got over to the window. I thought at first she was mad at me, then she just said, "Come here, Jenny. Help me get back in bed. I'm tired now."

She put her arm on my shoulder and leaned on me and got back in bed. I was really happy and wanted to tell Daddy, but she said I must promise and cross my heart that I wouldn't tell anybody. She said she wanted to surprise daddy, and if I told, it would spoil the surprise. She told me to go and play like she always did and I went down to play in the cellar.

The policeman asked me what I played when I was down in the cellar. At first I didn't want to tell, but then I remembered it wouldn't make any difference to Mama now, so I told him.

Mostly, I take Mama's dresses out of the trunk and put them on and dance. I pretend I'm a famous dancer like Mama used to be. I knew that if Mama ever caught me she'd be really mad. I didn't see how she could though, not being able to come downstairs.

Anyway, I had on Mama's dress and her shoes when the cellar door

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opened. I didn't hear it open but you can tell because it's in the kitchen floor and light comes down the steps. I hid behind Mama's trunk and then I heard something fall. I looked on the floor and it was Mama.

Then I looked up and saw Uncle Allen's foot.

I ran over to Mama and called her, but she wouldn't wake up. I ran up the stairs because I was afraid, but the door was locked. I guess Uncle Allen locked it. I got sort of excited then because I noticed Mama's eyes were open and sort of staring, but I knew she wasn't awake.

I ran in the house and called daddy's office. Judy—that's daddy's nurse—said he wasn't there, but if it was important she'd tell him to call me. I hardly ever called daddy because I wasn't allowed to. But I told Judy that Mama had fallen down the stairs.

"How did you get out of the cellar?" the policeman asked. "I thought you said the door was locked."

"There's a coal chute that's kind of like a tunnel. If you lie on your back and push with your heels, you can wiggle up the tunnel, and the first thing you know you come out a little window."

"Did your daddy come right away?"

"In a little while. I went upstairs and washed and changed my dress. I knew daddy would be mad if I was all dirty when he came home."

The policeman swung back and forth in daddy's chair and sometimes wrote with his pencil, then he said, "Tell me about your Uncle Allen."

"He's nice. He looks kind of like daddy. He's tall and his hair is brown. Once he brought me a doll. He comes to see Mama every Wednesday. I think maybe he used to help Mama when she tried to walk. The first time he came, Mama cried and laughed and cried some more and hugged him. Then the next day daddy had some men come and put those funny things on the stairs so Mama could come downstairs in her wheel chair. She hardly ever came down though except when Uncle Allen came and sometimes he would push her out in the yard. Then Mama acted real happy. She told me I must not tell anybody about Uncle Allen. I know Mama liked him though because once I saw Uncle Allen put some of Mama's things in his pocket."

"What kind of things?"

"A necklace that she had and some bracelets and things."

"The foot at the top of the stairs that day, are you sure it was Uncle Allen's foot? Men's shoes look an awful lot alike."

I thought real hard. "No, I guess it could have been somebody else's like daddy's, though not yours because they're too big."

The policeman sat up straight then like I had said something real

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interesting. "Then you're not sure it was your Uncle Allen?"

"Oh, yes. I know it was Uncle Allen. When the door slammed shut, it sort of blew the wind down and I could smell him. He doesn't smell like daddy. He smells sort of like ladies do, you know, like he wears perfume or something."

I was getting tired of talking and I hoped the policeman was through. He looked at me for a long time as though he was thinking, then he said I could go and play, but to tell Martha to come and see him.

I hate Martha. She's mean and fat with little eyes like a pig. When I told her the policeman wanted her, she just sort of grunted and wiped her hands on her fat stomach like she always does. I waited until she went down the hall, then I lifted the trap door and went down into the cellar. I wanted to hear what the policeman said to Martha and all I had to do was sit real quiet by the furnace and their voices would come down the pipe. I heard some noise like the chair scraping and I could just see Martha dropping into one. She never sits down in a chair like other people do. She falls and then she huffs and puffs when she pulls herself back out.

He talked to her for a little while and then he told her what I had said. I sort of wished then that I hadn't told him all the things I did, but I didn't expect him to tell Martha. She said she didn't know anything about any Uncle Allen and if that Jenny told you, don't put any stock in it because she's crazy. Then he asked her if she had ever seen the doll Uncle Allen gave me. Martha sort of snorted through her nose like she does all the time.

"You mean the doll she stole. Belonged to the little girl next door. Carol's her name. She seen Jenny playin' with it out in the yard and started kickin up a fuss. I told Jenny to give it back, but she wouldn't. Said it was hers when I knew it wasn't. Little Carol started to cry and Jenny like to beat that child to death with that doll. Terrible temper Jenny has sometimes. Told her daddy about it, but I don't expect he said nothin' to Jenny. Just gave me money to give the little girl.

"The doctor he don't never say nothin' to Jenny when she acts up the way she does. Queer Jenny is and her daddy ought to do somethin' about it, but he don't care what I have to put up with. He ain't hardly ever here to see some of the things she does.

"Already give the doctor my notice. I ain't gonna stay with Jenny no more. Mean she is. Plain mean. Stays down in the cellar all day playin with her mother's things like they was hers. Ain't no way to make her mind."

The policeman didn't know it, but Martha was on her favorite subject, which is me, and when she gets started yelling you can hardly make her stop.

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She told the policeman about the time I killed her cat. She made it look worse than it was though because I just did it to prove to her that a cat doesn't have nine lives like she tried to tell me it did. That's the way Martha is. She never quite tells the truth like why you do something, just that you do it.

I wished I'd told him how she used to lock me in the cellar. She thought I couldn't get out. So did I and I was afraid and cried until I found out about the coal chute. Then I started playing in the cellar all the time because I knew Martha was afraid to come down. She said there were rats down there. Once I found one. He was dead though. I sneaked in Martha's room and put him in her bed. She really screamed and jumped up and down in her nightgown. Daddy finally had to give her some pills to make her be quiet.

The policeman started talking about Mama then. I guess he was tired of hearing Martha rave about me.

"Poor lady. Hardly ever even got in her wheel chair. Used to lie up in that room all the time not doin' nothin'. Couldn't even get her out in the sunshine after the doctor built that contraption on the stairs. Sure would have been a lot easier for me if she'd come downstairs. Traipsed up and down them steps a dozen times a day, I did, checkin' to see if she was all right. Jenny, she wouldn't help nobody. Get down in that cellar and no amount of callin' would make her come out again. Ain't gonna stay here with that crazy little girl no more."

No matter what Martha started talking about, she always ended up yelling about me. She was always saying she was going to leave, but she never did.

I heard her clomp down the hall into the kitchen. She lifted up the trap door and called. "Jenny, come up here and eat your dinner. I know you're down there." I didn't even answer. I never did. Besides, I knew the policeman would talk to daddy and I wanted to hear what he said.

Daddy stayed in his room or in his study almost all the time since Mama fell down the stairs. I sort of wondered how he felt because once after Mama had her first accident, Judy came to stay to help take care of Mama. I was down in the cellar and I heard daddy say. "I can't tell her now, Judith, not the way she is." And Judy said, "What about me? What about our own lives?"—like it was real important.

"We'll have to go on, Judith, just as we have been." Daddy's voice was sad like he felt sorry for Judy. Then I heard Judy begin to cry. Then I didn't hear anything else.

Once I asked daddy if he liked Judy better than he did Mama or me, but he just looked at me for a long time and told me to go and play.

The policeman was talking to

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daddy now and then I heard myself talking, saying all the things I had said to the policeman. It took me a minute to figure out that it was coming from a recording machine and I wondered where the policeman had it and why he hadn't told me about it. Then I heard Martha raving again and then it was the quiet.

Finally the policeman said, "We know your wife had no brother, and we know that no one has seen this Uncle Allen except the child. What we don't know is whether or not it would have been possible for your wife to walk."

"Medically, I would say, no. You can check that too, I suppose. A good many specialists saw Catherine. The opinions were always the same." Daddy talked as if he were very tired and didn't really feel like talking to the policeman at all. "Miracles happen, though. There are many cases that medical science can't explain—impossible cases where—"

The policeman interrupted Daddy and said, "But you don't believe she walked, do you?"

"No. But when Jenny told you her mother walked, it could have been so in her mind. Rather like wishful thinking. She could have wanted so much for her mother to walk that she simply said she did. She actually believed it."

"How do you explain Uncle Allen?"

Daddy didn't say anything for a while as if he might be thinking hard. "Children have vivid imaginations. Jenny is alone much of the time. She has no playmates. Sometimes children invent people. They pretend, but in the pretending their minds go a little bit further until the person they've invented becomes real to them. Sometimes the person takes the blame for the naughty things the child does. For example, the doll 'Uncle Allen' gave her which in reality she took from the child next door. Also, her mother's jewelry that she mentioned this 'Uncle' having. It's true the jewelry is gone, but it never occurred to me to question Jenny. Naturally, I knew of no such person as 'Uncle Allen' or I would have been concerned. She never mentioned him to me or to Martha. I didn't want to disturb my wife by telling her that the jewelry was gone. They were pieces that she was exceptionally fond of."

I heard chairs scrape and the policeman walk across the floor. I knew it was him because daddy doesn't make very much noise when he walks. "You have an explanation for everything, Doctor, and the one about 'Uncle Allen' fits in exactly with what I believe. Your wife's wheel chair was found in her room, yet your wife who couldn't walk was found at the bottom of the cellar steps. How did she get down the stairs, through the hall, and across the kitchen? I'll tell you. She came down in her wheel chair,

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finds out Jenny is wearing her things. She scolds her. There is an argument. Jenny gets scared or she loses her temper. She pushed her mother down the stairs, takes the wheel chair back up, and then proceeds to make up the story about her mother walking and her 'Uncle Allen' standing at the top of the stairs. 'Uncle Allen' is substituting for the naughty Jenny, just like he got the jewelry, just like he gave her the doll. It all fits, Doctor, and you know it."

I decided I didn't like that policeman after all. That wasn't the way it was at all.

Daddy still didn't say anything and the policeman said after a while, "Hell, I don't like to believe what I'm thinking any more than you do, but the woman, Martha, telling about her killing the cat—that isn't normal for a kid of nine. It isn't normal for a kid that age to invent people either."

He stopped talking and it seemed as though he might be waiting for daddy to say something, but when he didn't, the policeman said, "I don't want to take the kid in—not today. I suggest you get hold of a good psychiatrist and have him check the kid. Get a lawyer too. No one is going to do anything to her. They won't do anything to hurt her—you know that—just put her some place where she'll get the help she needs."

I heard the policeman leave and right after that I heard daddy drive away in his car. I went upstairs and outside. Midget had a frog in her mouth. I took it away from her and put it in my pocket. When I went back in the kitchen, Martha was standing there stirring something in a big pot. I took the frog out of my pocket and dropped it in the pot. Martha slammed down her spoon. "You nasty hateful little girl. I ain't gonna stay here no more with you. You're crazy. For all I know you'll push me down the stairs like you did your mama, though I'd like to see you try."

She was yelling real loud and her face got red she was so mad. She stomped out and came back with her hat and coat. "I'm goin' to my sister's. Your daddy can send my pay. He's gonna come get you and they'll take you away and put you where you belong."

I giggled because Martha looked so funny and because I had finally got rid of her. She flounced out and I watched her walk in the rain. She always looks so funny when she tries to walk fast. She shakes all over. Then I went in daddy's study and looked in his microscope and at some books. I'm never supposed to go in there but there wasn't anyone to tell and it was a good chance.

I was looking at a real interesting picture of a man's insides when I heard a car crunch on gravel. I put the book back on the shelf and peeked out the window. I heard a car door slam, but it was raining so hard I could hardly see the man

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who came toward the door. I decided to hide and I grabbed up Midget and ran to the hall closet, the one under the stairs when I heard the key in the lock, and he called, "Jenny. Jenny."

I held Midget real close to me so she wouldn't bark and scratched her behind her ear. Far away I heard the rain beating against the window, but mostly I just heard my own heart pounding. I held my breath because I couldn't quite hear where he was. Then I let it out real slow.

I knew I wouldn't hear him if he came down the hall because of the carpet. Then I heard him go up the stairs. I counted eight and that meant he was on the landing. Then I heard him call me again and I knew that he opened the door to my room.

I tried real hard to hear but it thundered so loud that I lost track of where he was. I wondered if he had started back down the stairs, and then I heard another step. He was still upstairs. If he came down again, he was sure to see the hall closet and think of looking in it. The closet was empty and he would see me if he opened the door.

Quietly, quietly, I opened the door. My hand was wet and the knob was sort of slippery. Midget was getting heavy and I wished that I could put her down. I closed the closet door and held my breath. I wished I couldn't hear the blood pounding so hard in my head.

I tiptoed across the kitchen and opened the cellar door and slipped down the steps. I had taken off my shoes and left them on the first step, and the concrete through my socks was real cold. I was kind of scared but I didn't want to turn on the light. I held real tight to Midget.

I knew he was coming back for me—I was sure of it. I knew that I could get out the coal chute, but I wanted to rest a minute. I sat down with my back to Mama's trunk and listened.

Then I heard him come down the hall, and just like I knew he would, he opened the hall closet. I heard his footsteps in the kitchen, and I hurried over to the coal chute. The cellar door opened and the light from the kitchen came down and he called, "Jenny. Jenny. I know you're here. I found your shoes."

I had to leave Midget in the cellar because she was afraid to go through the coal chute. Just as I got outside and decided to run into the house and hide where he had already looked, he called again. "I found Midget, Jenny."

I opened the kitchen door real quiet, but he was on his way back up, and I had to jump behind the door in the shadow. I saw his head and then his shoulders. He was carrying Midget. "Good dog. Find Jenny."

When he put her on the floor, Midget stood there wagging her tail back and forth and wiggling from side to side. She'd think it

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was a game, but I knew she would find me in a minute . . .

Far away the door chimes rang. I jumped over the open trap door and ran. It was the policeman and daddy. I was awful glad to see them, but I started to cry. Daddy put his arm around me and said, "What is it, Jenny? What's the matter?"

Before I could answer, Midget began to bark, and the policeman looked and saw her at the top of the cellar door. He ran, and daddy ran too.

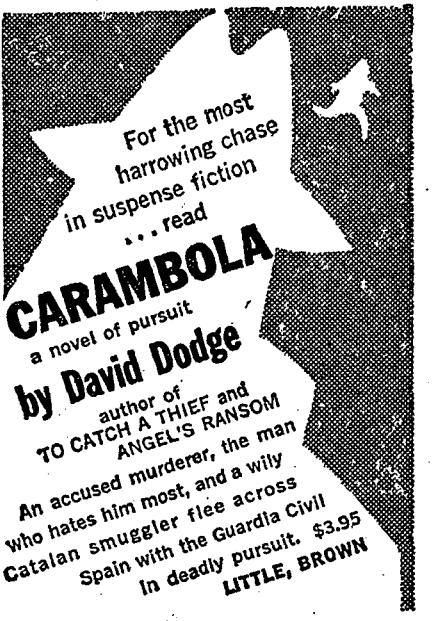
I heard them go down the steps, but I sat at the top. I didn't want to go down in the cellar any more.

Then the policeman asked daddy. "Do you know him?"

Daddy said a bad word like he was real surprised. "That's—why, his name is Allen—Allen Mayberry. Haven't seen him in years—he was a dancer in Catherine's company. But it never occurred to me—well, I had no idea—"

"This must be Jenny's Uncle Allen." The policeman said it like maybe he wasn't real sure.

Grownups sure are funny. I knew all the time it was Uncle Allen.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THE GOAT ON THE TERRACE

by RITA STUDD

HE SAID THAT HE WAS AN ARCHITECT and it is true that he owned a drafting board. It stood there in the room he called his office, always with the same sketch thumb-tacked to the left-hand side. On the right were a T square and a case of drafting tools, ready for use.

The room itself was dark, too dark to work in. It was on the north side of the house, and although there were several large windows they only contributed to the darkness. Much of the glass had been broken by the concussion from bombings. The broken windows were covered with an opaque, oily material like a tarpaulin. Artificial lighting was, of course, out of the question in the years following the war. The Germans were allotted but a couple of hours of electricity a day. Perhaps he did his sketches on the big table in the kitchen where the light was stronger, but more likely, the architect's tools were merely props to support a symbol of something he might have been, or the setting for a dream not yet surrendered.

This is not to imply that he was idle. He worked hard and long. His real place of business was his brief case. It was part of his costume, like a magician's hat, and its contents were just as varied and unlikely. A Meissen figurine, a lace mantilla, a cameo brooch, some

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fresh mushrooms, a dachshund puppy were but a sampling of the items which constituted his wares. These things the Americans bought—at Herr Honig's prices.

The Americans, he thought as he walked along. Greedy and generous, that is what they were. Paradoxical perhaps, yet such a combination of traits made excellent customers for a man with Herr Honig's talents. He took pride in his ability to manipulate these foreigners. A bargain hinted at: "She needs the money quickly, so the candelabra she is willing to sell." Or snobbishness played on: "The furs were selected for a famous German movie star." Or competition encouraged: "Your friend Mrs. Adams also inquired about such a Biedermieier table, but—"

He stopped at a small iron gate and pushed the buzzer. A dog came barking across the lawn. The front door opened and a woman's voice called, "Oh, it's you, Herr Honig—just a minute now and I'll let you in if I can just figure out which of these buttons to push."

There was a short buzz. He pushed the gate open. The white wooden nameplate banged against the black iron palings: COLONEL JOHN H. MACK. The letters stood stiff and straight, as if to demand a salute for their owner. He looked from the nameplate to the woman standing in the doorway. "The colonel's lady," he murmured to himself. Had she ever heard of Kipling?

Mrs. Mack closed the door and came down the front steps. "I just never will understand why you Germans have locks on these little ole fences that any granddaddy hoptoad could jump over." She laughed at her own exaggeration. American laughter puzzled him. He suspected that they laughed just to show off their good teeth. He could assign no other reason for it.

"Herr Honig," she drawled, "your ears should be real pink. I just been talking about you. I was telling my friend, Mary Lou, about the dinner. All the ladies just oh-ed and ah-ed at the flowers—but when Elsa served the asparagus they were just bug-eyed. Course, one of 'em did say the green kind like we have at home does taste better but—" she smiled broadly, "I guess I'm like Cory, our ole cook, back home. She always used to say, 'Yo all can Birds Eye if yo wants but Ah prefers to Fresh Vegetable'."

The reminiscence caused more laughter. Herr Honig dismissed a slight frown. How much the woman talked to say so little!

"I am pleased that Madam enjoyed the asparagus. Perhaps I could get more in the next days. It is not easy. So many of the gardens were destroyed in the bombings." He paused significantly.

"Today, if Madam has time, I thought we could plan for Madam's rose garden." He opened his brief case and took out a carefully

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folded newspaper. From its folds he took a long-stemmed yellow rose which he handed to her. She accepted it eagerly, sniffing its fragrance, then brushing a soft petal against her cheek.

"Why, it's just like one Momma used to have, right by the side porch." She started across the lawn. "I know just the vase I'll put it in, the pale blue one."

Herr Honig allowed himself a smile. "I suggest that we plant the roses before we pick them—if Madam does not object."

"Whoa! I was rushing things a bit, but I can hardly wait to see all those roses blooming. I talked to the Colonel about the place you suggested for the rose garden. He said it was okay with him as long as we didn't expect him to have anything to do with it." She snapped off a dry ivy leaf from the corner of the house. "He doesn't think you can move the statue." She wagged her finger playfully. "But I just told him—if it can be done, Herr Honig can do it. Didn't he get me a hot-water heater in one day when your ole Army Engineers said three or four weeks."

They had come to the end of the terrace at the rear of the house and stopped in front of a statue. The cast-stone figure depicted a young goat standing on his hind legs, his forelegs aimed straight ahead as if he were about to leap to a higher crag. She patted the rough head affectionately.

"He looks so frisky you can almost smell him."

Herr Honig watched her. Could it be that she had any appreciation for this work of art? Had she heard something? But of course not—she would know no one who would recognize a piece of Sintenis sculpture.

"He's a little too frisky for a rose garden, *nicht wahr?*"

She nodded. "I suppose so. If it were one of those cute little children with a basket we could let it stay, but an old billy goat cavorting around—how much do you reckon he weighs?"

"It would be hard to say. Two or three men could handle him, I think. I have spoken to my cousin about the truck. The difficulty is, of course, the benzine—the gas he could get some, but first he must pay—"

She cocked her head inquisitively. "And how many cartons of cigarettes will he need?"

"Cigarettes are not so good at the moment. Fat perhaps; Crisco—the three pound cans; soap—Ivory; coffee—but in the vacuum pack."

Somehow this amused her. She laughed again.

"I declare, Herr Honig, you'd be right at home in the A. and P. You know so much about American groceries."

She turned and started back toward the house.

"Let's go see how much of a down payment is left in the pan-

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try. It's just my luck to have ordered tons of cigarettes. Ah, well, the Colonel's flying down to Italy the end of the week, maybe he can pick up soap there. I'm sending an order to the Export Company. What do you think I should get? Mrs. Adams tells me cocoa is worth its weight in gold these days."

He shrugged. "Every day it is different. Who can say? You order it today. You get the order a month later. Maybe then it is cigarettes are good again."

"Speaking of orders, I'm planning one for Sears Roebuck. Does your wife want anything besides the stockings and the sweater?"

"Madam is too kind."

"Oh, Herr Honig, you know I just love shopping even if it has to be by catalogue. By the way, didn't the shoes fit your boys?"

"The shoes were fine, Madam. The boys are still wearing them to school each day."

"I just wondered. Mrs. Adams told me that if I saw you today to have you stop by as she had some shoes for your boys. I knew they couldn't outgrow shoes in three weeks. I thought maybe the ones I'd given them had been too small and you didn't want to hurt my feelings by telling me."

He glanced at her suspiciously. "No, Madam, the shoes were fine, but when their cousins saw them they were feeling bad. It did not seem necessary to mention the cousins. Mrs. Adams is such a busy lady I did not think to bother her with my relatives. Does Madam believe I should say—?"

She interrupted, "But of course not, I'm sure many shoes are needed."

He studied her face. Her expression was guileless enough. His pleasure in swindling the Americans was never quite complete. He couldn't even be certain that his subtler shafts of sarcasm hit their mark. Like the time he had told Mrs. Mack about the Russian soldiers being so impressed with German plumbing that they removed the faucets to take back to their own country. The anecdote had amused her, but she had laughed just as much when, after procuring a dinner set for her, he had inquired, "And now what will you serve on your fine Meissen? Spam?"

Then there had been the affair of the books. (Had the book dealer recovered yet? he wondered) Mrs. Mack had wanted books—about twenty of them. Neither the authors nor contents were important. The size of the volumes and the color of the bindings were the prerequisites of purchase. The books must be big enough to balance a collection of music boxes which she insisted belonged on the library shelves.

The bindings must pick up the color in the draperies—certain shades of green and brown would do. There must be some with illus-

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trations suitable for framing, and several with red bindings. She needed red for an accent color. He remembered the pained expression on the book dealer's face as she selected a magnificent folio of Albrecht Durer's prints exclaiming, "This shade is just right! How many copies do you have?" It was probably the largest sale the store had had in months, and Herr Honig's double commission—one from the dealer and an even larger one from Mrs. Mack—was only, he felt, his just due. Yet he could not resist saying, "We Germans have been told that China has a great culture but no civilization, whereas the United States has a great civilization but no culture: Does Madam think this is true?"

She had looked thoughtful for a moment then replied, "Hey, how about that!" Yet only a few sentences later she made mention of General Clay granting amnesty to all lesser Nazis. Did he only imagine it or had she stressed the last two words?

But enough of this conjecturing. The degree of her naivete was unimportant. What was important was that the statue would be his and soon—and the American lady none the wiser. She would never know that she had discarded something whose value was far greater than all her other acquisitions.

They went into the house where the pantry yielded "the down payment" to his brief case.

"My cousin must get the benzine from the zone. By next week the arrangements I will have made. I will at the same time bring some of the rosebushes."

She took a box of cookies from the shelf. "Here, take these to your boys."

"Thank you, Madam—but you spoil them."

"It's nothing. And say Hi to Mrs. Honig."

As he closed the gate he thought of his conversation with the art dealer in Kurfurstendam. The dealer had been dubious. Naturally the charming little animal figures of Renee Sintenis were a rarity and much prized these days. She had done only a few larger pieces, and to have discovered one of them was indeed unbelievable. Few sculptors matched her ability to capture and reproduce instantaneous movement. He recalled the art dealer's comment, "If it is so, we'll both be rich—very rich."

The arrangements for the truck could be made quickly. However, with the Americans it was better to prolong the job. He decided that seven days would be the proper interval of delay.

Early the following week Herr Honig received a message to call Mrs. Mack. When he telephoned, she was vague and mysterious. She said she had a surprise for him. He would be so pleased. He must stop by as soon as possible. Neither the urgency nor the mystery impressed

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him. She was always in a rush to snatch up some bargain. She had probably discovered "just a wonderful little place" where they made leather goods and wanted him to negotiate and interpret for her. He knew that she delighted in the dark backrooms where so many of the purchases were made. The atmosphere seemed to make her feel that she was playing a part in some minor intrigue and added to the excitement of shopping. He agreed to stop by as soon as he was in the neighborhood.

He had hardly touched the bell at the gate when the buzzer sounded. Mrs. Mack opened the door and came down the steps.

"We'll go right around to the garden," she called.

He hurried to catch up with her. When they came to the rear terrace she stopped.

"See anything different?"

It was then that he did see—or rather he didn't, for it was no longer there to be seen. It was gone. His statue was gone. She kept talking and laughing but he heard nothing. He stared at the spot. Comprehension came slowly. Her words began to filter through to his consciousness. ". . . and there he was—staring right out from the page—our goat. It was just like seeing an old friend in a crowd on television. I was so excited I just forgot all about those pictures I was looking for. At the store I'd noticed some real pretty pictures in some of those books. I figured maybe I could get several of them framed to hang over that chest in the hall, but I sure didn't expect to find our Billy prancing around those pages. 'Boy,' I said, 'you must be somebody to have your picture in such a big book.' Then I started phoning. I called the Education Branch first 'cause they always know everything. They told me the man to call in Cultural Affairs. He was just so nice and interested. He called back this morning to report that the statue had been delivered to the artist's home yesterday. It seems she's quite old and her studio was destroyed in the war. She doesn't have many of her works left. She was delighted to have this one returned to her—and you, Herr Honig, you should be delighted too. You don't have to bother about getting the truck or any of that. Isn't it a good thing I bought all those red books? I never thanked you enough, Herr Honig, for finding that cute little book shop for me."

For once Herr Honig had no sly remark.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**NICHOLAS DIMINNO**
TITLE:	***Case of the Night Club Chanteuse***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	The Lieutenant
LOCALE:	United States
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*A cheap night-club murder with all the trimmings . . . but in the end it was straight police work—just plain pounding the streets and looking for a break.*

THE LIEUTENANT HAD NEVER MET a more disagreeable little man. A complete and total sourness about life and human motives was in everything the man said, in his expression, even in the way he sat. The man's name was Allie Parks and he was a night club comedian.

"How well did you know Madeleine?" asked the Lieutenant.

"You mean Sophie," the little man said dourly.

"Sophie," said the Lieutenant, thinking the least they could do for Sophie now was to use her professional name. They were in the cubbyhole that passed for Allie Parks's dressing room. Parks had just described it for the Lieutenant ("Every half hour somebody shoves a broom in"). Some of it had been funny and if the Lieutenant hadn't been on duty he would have been amused.

"When did you know her as Sophie?"

"Back in Miami. Before she became a chanteuse. Chanteuse," Parks said acidly. "Someone who's not French and can't sing."

The Lieutenant frowned. "Parks, you don't seem to understand that this girl is dead."

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry," sighed Parks, "but I used up all my tears at the track last night."

The Lieutenant studied him as he picked at a scab on his hand. A real lovable fellow, this Allie Parks. Being sour on everything and every-

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body was his stock in trade, but you'd think he might suspend that for a couple of minutes when a fellow performer died.

"The last time you spoke to Madeleine, what did you talk about?"

"She was flying. Got this wire from Las Vegas. Starting next month. Was going to tell the dice players about Paris for a grand a week."

"Had she ever been to Paris?"

"Are you kidding?"

"Quite a step up for her, wasn't it? From this?" The Lieutenant indicated the peeling walls and the single unshaded bulb.

"Yah," said Parks gloomily. "You asked what we talked about. It was a monologue. Las Vegas, Las Vegas, Las Vegas. All I could do was stand there. Real stooge. Like I was working for her."

"If you knew Madeleine back in Miami you'd be able to tell me something about her family, friends, what she did before she changed her name."

"She was Sophie Klinger. After I heard that and laughed at it, that was all. Then she shows up here as Madeleine, with an accent you could cut with a knife."

"Had she changed in other ways? From Miami?"

Parks picked at the scab. "Back there she was a brunette, up here she's a blonde. But that's the smallest change. Now she's high-powered. Asks for a match and makes a big deal of it."

"And you didn't like that?"

"Who am I to like?" said Parks. "The customers did. Those dopes like anything."

"Do they like you?" questioned the Lieutenant.

"If they stop eating their celery long enough," grumbled Parks.

"I understand the room was quiet when Madeleine sang."

"Yeah. They were asking themselves, 'What is it?'"

Parks began to clean his fingers with a tiny penknife. The Lieutenant took out his notebook and eyed the few heiroglyphics there. Madeleine, *née* Sophie, a champagne blonde currently masquerading as a chanteuse and doing a good job of it, according to the manager, who'd said that while her French was phony, her humming was sexy and that was the important thing.

Madeleine had died after swallowing an unknown substance. Suicide wasn't likely. The first thing the Lieutenant had done after learning of the Las Vegas offer was to phone the club in Nevada and ask if they'd withdrawn the offer. They hadn't. And why would a featherheaded girl like Madeleine commit suicide when she had her own version of the world at her feet?

The coroner estimated the stuff had been in her system for three hours, and three hours prior to her death she'd been doing her turn on the floor. She'd circulated around

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the tables, throwing roses to visiting firemen, and here and there taking a coquettish sip from a patron's glass.

Tonight she'd done that only once—taken a sip, that is—from the glass of a distinguished-looking man. According to the manager, the man might have been a Senator. The Lieutenant could see them putting out wanted posters: "Looks like Senator."

"Did she have any gentleman friends?"

Parks cleaned another fingernail before replying. "No. Around here they were all too small-time for her."

Was there more than the usual sourness in that, the Lieutenant wondered.

"Did they include you?"

"Me?" Parks laughed mirthlessly. "I didn't give her a tumble. She was a cow."

"A cow? I thought she had quite a figure."

"I mean her mind."

The Lieutenant decided that he'd had enough bitterness for one night. This little guy was beginning to ruin his digestion. He went out and down the narrow hall that smelled of disinfectant. This was where the dreams are made, he thought as a chorus girl shouldered past him. Had he talked to this one? He couldn't be sure. All these chorus girls looked alike to him. He'd count them later and check them off.

In Madeleine's room he looked around. Was there any corner, any closet he might have missed? It wasn't likely. Not that he'd been so thorough. It was a bare little room, pathetic really; you could span it with both arms outstretched. There was a strong odor of cheap pine scent and the walls were mouldy; from here Madeleine had issued radiant to sing of love in Paris. Poor kid.

He thumbed once again through the scrapbook on the table. A good-looking girl with long straight legs. Nice smile. On her way to making a thousand a week singing miserable French to people who didn't know any French.

But it was more than that. It was something of herself that she was able to give—illusion, glamor, something that people needed the way they needed butter and eggs. He guessed that Sophie Klinger had spent long years in Miami storing up those illusions. Too bad she was gone now before she'd had a chance to cash in.

Joe the bartender was waiting, as the Lieutenant had ordered him to, but he didn't look happy. He'd hinted more than once that he'd been up all night and would like a little shut-eye, but the Lieutenant had ignored him. Now he went into the same act as the Lieutenant approached, stifling a yawn and glancing at his watch.

"Now about this man who sat at the front table."

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"The one she took the drink off of?"

"Yes. What did he look like again?"

"An important person," pronounced Joe. "The type that money's no object. Left me a big tip."

"Oh, he was at the bar, too?"

"Sure. Sat at the bar for half an hour until that table was empty. Had ten or twelve whiskies. Straight."

"You're sure it's the same one who sat at the front table?"

"Oh, yeah. I asked around, y'know, what's up, and one of the boys tells me this Madeleine's waltzing around and picks up the drink of this big shot up front. She drinks it and a couple hours later, whammo. She's dead. I ask about this big shot naturally, what he looks like, and it's got to be the guy who had ten whiskies. Or maybe it was twelve."

"What did he look like, Joe?"

"A six-footer. About fifty-five, I'd say. Two hundred dollar suit. Classy shirt. Everything new. Everything."

"How about his face?"

"Oh, his face. Red. Good living, y'know. Lots of steaks."

"What color hair?"

"White. Looked like an alderman."

The manager had said Senator. They were getting more cautious.

"You'd know him again if you saw him?"

"Sure. Couldn't miss. Culture. Class," winked Joe. "What he was doing in this rat-trap I'll never know. Atmosphere maybe. Slumming, huh?

"Maybe it was to see Madeleine. Did he talk about her at all?"

Joe considered. "Nope. Talked about a lot of things—walking encyclopedia, for cryin' out loud—but didn't mention her. Concentrated on his drinking. Finished 'em as fast as I could set 'em up. Paid up with a big bill and told me to keep the change."

Joe was definitely in the distinguished gentleman's corner and his expression show that he thought the Lieutenant was wasting his time in that direction.

"It seems you're the only one who got a good look at him. The waiters couldn't see much of him out on the floor and when the lights followed Madeleine around they were purple. He looked like a banker, you'd say?"

"Or a broker. Neat as a pin. Looked like when he wore a shirt once he threw it away. Take his shoes now. Brand-new. Forty or fifty bucks if they cost a dime."

"How could you tell they were new?"

"When he crossed his legs here on the stool. The part between the sole and heel, y'know? Clean as a whistle."

The Lieutenant made a note. "Did he seem to have his eye on any particular table?"

"Well, he looked at the floor once

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or twice. There were a couple open but that type's got to have one up front. It goes with the upbringing. Y'know, the best of everything. Money no object."

"And when this front table was empty he took it?"

"That's right." Joe smothered another yawn.

The Lieutenant was getting tired himself. A few hours of sleep wouldn't hurt, but the trail might get cold. What trail, he asked himself sardonically. He went to the phone and called up the Medical Examiner. Peters answered and said he'd wrapped it up. The stuff had been taken three hours before death and he'd done some sleuthing himself and learned that the deceased had been in the middle of her *Rainy Boulevard* number when she'd absorbed it. Now all the Lieutenant had to do was find out what she'd been up to during that *Rainy Boulevard*.

The Lieutenant hung up. It jibed with what he figured. It had been set up deliberately. Joe's man had ordered a sherry from the waiter—the sort of drink he expected Madeleine wouldn't pass up. It came in a delicate slender glass and it had appealed to Madeleine. It he'd had a whiskey now, the sophisticated chanteuse would have passed it by. And why would a man who'd downed twelve whiskies like a machine suddenly switch to sherry at the table? Except as a come-on for the chanteuse?

The Lieutenant walked out on the floor, past the plate-sized tables and up the dark stairs to the street. It was light now, with patches of red in the east. He inhaled deeply and turned to look at the garish signs pasted over the entrance. *The Bon Voyage. Dancing. Entertainment. Allie Parks, Straight From Miami. Madeleine, Sophisticated Chanteuse.*

He was about to step into his car when he had a thought. Jack Fisher. He'd talk to Jack Fisher. He went back down the stairs and across the echoing floor.

Fisher was still in his office. The Lieutenant could hear him through the thin door. He seemed to be talking to someone in New York and had a real problem on his hands. The Lieutenant entered. Jack Fisher waved and went on talking.

"She was going great, Carl, great. With her it wasn't a cheap joint, it was artistic. She didn't look down on the place. Good business, very good business. She's dead, I'm telling you. How? You wouldn't believe me. Never mind that, I need a replacement. Sure, a singer. A class singer. I got a comic and a magician and a chorus, I gotta have a singer. What, a girl with a big loud voice? No, that gets people restless and they start fights. You know my clientele. A tough crowd. This dame would sing soft about the Rue de Baloo and they'd hang on it like they were born there too. So try, hard Carl? Try hard."

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He hung up and massaged the back of his neck. His glasses were on the desk and his eyes were red and squinting. He looked like a petulant child.

"Suddenly nobody's got a singer," he said. "All my life singers are breaking down my door and suddenly, no singers. Leaves me nowhere. Well, Lieutenant," he put on his glasses and became a shrewd, watchful businessman again. "What's the dope on Madeleine?"

"She was murdered."

"But who'd murder her?" demanded Fisher. "She was a good kid. Had her faults but who doesn't?"

"What faults did she have?"

"Wanted more money. Wanted a special accompanist—our guy had no feel for her stuff. Wanted more mystery around her act. Didn't want to have to go through the kitchen to get to her dressing room. You know, stuff like that."

The Lieutenant guessed it was the plaint of night club managers all over the country—performers who refused to go through the kitchen like the rest of the help.

"So you think this important looking character's the guy?" said Fisher. "You think he sets it up, sitting there like a king with that glass that he's put something in and that sweet kid waltzes over with a big smile and drinks it and—Lieutenant, if that's true, y'know what they ought to do with that guy?"

As Fisher detailed the procedure, slowly, venomously, and with relish, the Lieutenant realized he was hungry. He'd have a bite before going down to the station.

"You never saw the man before?"

Fisher reluctantly left his narrative and said, "Nah. His type don't come in. We don't have that kind of reputation. Our club's for people who're sick of television but can't afford much else."

The Lieutenant couldn't agree. He had asked about the prices of drinks and a steak sandwich at the Bon Voyage and he knew one thing: he'd never have a steak or drink here. Maybe Fisher wasn't to blame, what with taxes and rental and cost of entertainment, but that still didn't explain why a steak sandwich was four-fifty.

"You got a look at this man?"

"Naturally. I spotted him immediately. I think to myself, 'Good, maybe we're starting a trend. Maybe Madeleine's bringing the better element down here.' Hah," he muttered. "I'd like to get my hands on that better element. Kills a sweet kid and leaves me standing high and dry . . . "

The Lieutenant had had enough of Fisher's problems and left. It was getting warm outside, as the sun got down to business, and he told Rooney, his driver, to go some place that was air-conditioned. Rooney, looking tired and rumpled, gave him a look that showed he agreed completely.

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Over his coffee and egg sandwich the Lieutenant tried to piece things together. Madeleine had been led to her death by someone with more than a little imagination. Someone she had rejected? Someone who had hired this Congressman-type to sit up there, his glass pushed to the edge of the table. The way he'd gulped those whiskies smacked of an expense account; he was a hired man, the Lieutenant was sure of it. And Madeleine had shown no particular recognition, according to the violinist who followed in her wake. She drank from the stranger's glass and looked into his eyes and cradled his chin, but she did that with everybody. It was Routine 3B.

Back in the station he rounded up a squad and told them what he wanted. An affluent-looking man who had entered the Bon Voyage, who looked as if he'd just stepped out of an expensive men's shop. The man had been hired for a job and he'd had to dress for it. A secretary was typing up a description of this bird, as accurate and complete as they could make it, and they were to scour the town.

Privately the Lieutenant hoped he was right about the expensive shop. There were only hundreds of them. If they got to the inexpensive shops . . . but he was trusting Joe the bartender. Joe had said it was a two hundred dollar suit and Joe, with his own quietly flashy attire, seemed to know what he was talking about. Anyway it was a start.

He took a nap in the duty room and when he got back to his office several hours later, messages were coming in over the telephones. The boys had covered quite a few shops and rounded up several characters who might have filled the bill. But discreet inquiries had crossed them off. The Lieutenant had warned them to be discreet. None of this bouncing a citizen into a car and hustling him over to the Bon Voyage for the unshaved waiters to have a look. They were dealing with important people, people who patronized expensive shops. They had to be careful or they'd catch hell from downtown.

The club was empty and silent at noon as his heels clacked on the hard wood of the floor. Somewhere a squeegee was operating and a fan blew a strong whiff of disinfectant his way. Nothing was quite so depressing as a cheap night club in the daytime. He found a waiter in the kitchen and asked where was everybody. Asleep, said the waiter. People had to go on sleeping, he intimated, no matter who died.

As the Lieutenant came back through the corridor he noticed a light in Allie Parks's room. The door was slightly open and he put his head in. Parks was stretched out on a trunk, his arms folded, his eyes closed. He looked peaceful, dead really, but he was only taking a sun bath. A portable sun lamp was hooked over the back of the chair. So that's how Allie kept his

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Miami tan. Where else could a man who slept days get it?

"Parks?"

"Um."

"I thought you might tell me a little more about Madeleine. In the old days."

"You mean Sophie. Look, Sheriff—"

"Lieutenant."

"Sorry. I thought I was farther west. These bookings." Parks shook his head. "All I know is she was a nice girl that couldn't sing and wasn't French. And piled the charm on with a trowel. Trowel? A shovel."

"Did Madeleine have a yen for any particular kind of man? To pull that gay charmer stuff with?"

"Any man who looked like he'd be embarrassed." Parks barely moved his lips, and his eyes were still closed. "If they were with their wives, you couldn't keep her away. And characters like this character."

"The man at the table?"

"Yuh." Parks opened a jaundiced eye. "You found who killed my pal Sophie?"

"Not yet."

"Wait'll the other chanteuses hear about this. It's taking your life in your hands to move around the tables and be popular. They're gonna demand hazard pay like paratroops."

The Lieutenant watched him curiously. Maybe Allie Parks was afraid to show his true feelings. Maybe he was grieving inside and passing it off with a gag. Or he might be nursing a massive hurt that the world or somebody had inflicted on him—by not recognizing his talent, perhaps, and consigning him to dingy basements like this Bon Voyage. Whatever it was, it was an unpleasant mask.

"You think it was something from one of the tables?" Parks said. "That's what finished her?"

"Looks that way."

"Well, that's the tab for freeloading drinks."

The Lieutenant wasn't finding him funny this morning. Maybe it was because he hadn't had much sleep and the nap at the station had left a metallic taste in his mouth. When a waiter came to tell him he was wanted on the phone, he left Parks under the lamp and went out into the dingy corridor again.

The call was from Regan. They had a hot tip. Foster Bentley's on the East Side had rigged up a gent two days ago. A rush job. The guy'd come in looking like a prospector from Death Valley and they'd fitted him out in everything. From hat to shoes. He was a tall man, corpulent, white hair, red face. In his fifties . . .

He got over to Foster Bentley's fast. They gave him the same information there, only with an Ivy League accent. At first they'd had doubts about doing business with the man but he'd pulled out a roll and they'd decided to go ahead. Gave his name as Smith. Said he

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was passing through. Looked like he was passing through on a freight. But they weren't moralists and his money was good and . . .

"Did he leave his old clothes here?"

"Yes." The salesman winced. "They're now cinders in our furnace."

"Will you check?"

The salesman consented icily and within ten minutes was back with a bundle. He looked crestfallen. "We usually burn this sort of thing immediately," he apologized.

The clothes were a collection of patches—old gray jacket, faded blue trousers, and what had once been a white shirt. The shoes were held together by twine. The Lieutenant didn't blame Foster Bentley for almost showing their owner the door. He bet they had rushed him into a dressing room away from prying eyes as soon as he waved the roll.

"Could you tell anything about him from these?" he asked.

The salesman sniffed. "Evidently he won a sweepstakes and wanted to see what good clothing was like. We get that sort now and then."

"Was he drunk?"

"No," said the salesman after a moment.

"Did he look like a thief or someone who'd gotten the money dishonestly?"

"No," conceded the salesman. "He spoke rather well. Sounded like there had once been good stuff in him. Got into some kind of trouble, evidently. Happens to lots of them."

The Lieutenant agreed, but couldn't help noting that the salesman disapproved of people who let troubles happen to them. They weren't Foster Bentley people.

He asked for a phone and called up the station. The boys were to forget expensive shops and hit the dives. Cheap bar, thirty-cent diners, Skid Row. They were to look for the same man, the big shot, but in a different setting. If he was among his peers he should stick out like a sore thumb, a banker among bums. It would be easy to spot him. Or he might be lying in some gutter, sleeping off a drunk. They would also check with clerks at hotels that had names like The Ace, The Elite, and The Star.

On the street he handed Rooney the bundle and told him to run it down to the lab. There might be traces of something and it was time those lazies down at the lab did some work.

Rooney drove off and the Lieutenant began to pound pavements. Along the river, east and west, he crossed and crisscrossed, through dingy alleys and deserted streets, poking through basements and old warehouses, searching cheap bars and cafeterias.

This was police work, he thought—not the dames or the dough or even the bullets, but just plain pounding the streets. Every half

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hour he called the station but nothing had come in. The other men were doing their own pounding and feeling their own frustrations.

Along about five he was good and tired and heading east. There was a Skid Row of sorts two blocks away; it was just beginning and only a few of the cognoscenti had drifted over. Stepping over planks and cobbles, he came into a dark gutted street that held only two brave bars and a flophouse called The Diamond.

He tried the bar first. Just bums, sprawled over the chairs watching television. No one who looked capable of going into the Bon Voyage and earning Joe's admiration as "class, culture."

He went down through the puddles and timbers to the other bar. It was misty and smoky but he saw his man almost immediately. His suit stood out like a stop sign; it was conservative, charcoal-colored, and discreetly tailored. The tie was understated, and the shirt, which was stained now, had been subdued and correct a few days ago. If this wasn't his Foster Bentley, the Lieutenant thought, he would eat that thirty-dollar hat.

He brushed through the idly moving bums and went up to the man, who was rambling loudly and vaguely. As he talked, the Lieutenant noted his beet-red face—it didn't mean good steaks, as Joe the barman thought, as much as it did grain spirits—and the area of one shoe between the sole and heel. Spotted, but not two days ago.

The man kept on talking to two derelicts sprawled against the far end of the booth. He was saying that there would always be rebels like themselves; there had been rebels in Greece, there had been rebels in Rome, but the world of antiquity treated its rebels better, much better. Here they were shunted in vile dens like this one . . . the Lieutenant tapped him on the shoulder.

"May I speak to you?"

The man looked at him and his face became stern. You could see why he would be mistaken for a Senator.

"You may not, sir. Can't you see I'm discussing a matter of some importance with my friends?"

The Lieutenant showed his credentials, pulled a chair over, and sat down, blocking off the two derelicts. In answer to the Lieutenant's question, the man said his name was Ferriston and he was a law-abiding citizen and taxpayer.

"Where did you get this suit?"

The man sighed, opened his jacket, and tried to peer at the label.

The Lieutenant did it for him and announced, "Foster Bentley."

"Attractive store. Personnel a bit distant though."

His head was beginning to nod and his eyelids looked heavy. He was going to go to sleep soon and for a long time and the Lieutenant couldn't wait.

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"Who gave you the money to buy this?"

"Estimable gentleman," said the other foggily.

"Why?"

"Why?" Ferriston shrugged. "Goodness of heart." He reached for his glass but the Lieutenant pushed it away.

"That wasn't it. He had you dress up for a purpose and you're going to tell me about it before you have another drink."

"Purpose, purpose?" Ferriston looked at him owlishly. Then he brightened. "Oh, yes! I was to take part in a practical joke. Did, as a matter of fact. Went off rather well, if I say so myself."

"What kind of a practical joke?" the Lieutenant said.

"Very funny joke. Priceless. This singer, you see—lovely child, charms the birds out of the trees—well, she's a great practical joker and we thought—"

"Who's we?"

Ferriston blinked. "Did I say 'we'? I meant *he* thought—this man, the one who gave me the money . . ."

"Yes, what did he think?" snapped the Lieutenant.

"That it would be paying her back in her own coin, so to speak, to—to . . ." His eyes glazed over as his head swayed closer to the table.

"What was the joke?" the Lieutenant said harshly.

"That I was to go into this night club and sit down and order sherry —horrible stuff—and Little Miss Personality would skip over and sip from my glass. She was a sweet thing too." Ferriston was mournful now. "But knew no more French than a cat. I taught French, you know, a million years ago—"

"She took your drink? That's all? Where's the joke?"

"In her drink," Ferriston said wanly. "I put the pill."

"What was the pill supposed to do?"

"Put her to sleep, wake her up—I don't remember."

"Was it poison?"

Ferriston's head came up with an effort. "No. No! Put her to sleep, I think it was. Yes, that was it. Very funny, don't you see? Drinking from my glass without so much as a by-your-leave and then falling sound asleep . . ."

"Who gave you this pill? Was it the same man who gave you the money for new clothes?"

Ferriston nodded.

"What did he look like?"

Ferriston's eyes were glazing again and the Lieutenant shook him hard, back and forth, until a flicker returned.

"Tall fellow. Young."

The head dropped with a thud, and the Lieutenant winced. Ferriston was out for good, and he would be out for a long time.

When the patrol car answered his call ten minutes later, the Lieutenant gave instructions. Ferriston was to be shipped to the hospital

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ınd sobered up. He was to be called vhen the man could talk coher- ɛntly.

Tall and young, he thought as he ıeaded back to the west side. Who n this picture was tall and young? None that he could think of. Of ɔourse Ferriston might give more letails when he woke up, but if it was someone totally new—he'd ɔeen hoping that it would be one of the Bon Voyage bunch.

Who else had been close enough ɔo her to want her murdered? A stage-door Johnny whom she had ɔold to go peddle his papers? If so, hey'd be looking the rest of their lives.

Rooney was parked in front of the night club when he got there. He had nothing to report and there had been no calls on the radio.

It's all up to me, thought the Lieutenant. That's the damn trouble with this department. He'd love someday while plugging away, while ruining shoe leather, to get it over the radio that his job had been done, that some eager beaver had come up with something. But the men on his squad—where you left them, that where you found them.

Clumping down the stairs, he guessed he was in a lousy mood. Tired. Not enough sleep.

Fisher, the manager, was in his office, still trying to get a singer to fly up right away. He was in such a spot that he could use almost any singer, but he preferred one with class, real class. The Lieutenant sat through a few minutes of it, then waved him to put the receiver down. With a final "And hurry up, Carl", Fisher hung up.

"I'd like all personnel who work here now to report in an hour. And I'll want the job records of everybody who's worked here in the last two years."

"Job records?" Fisher laughed gutturally. "This isn't U.S. Steel, Lieutenant. I mean, they come and they go. Who keeps records?"

"How's your memory then?" barked the Lieutenant.

"My memory's great, great," Fisher said hastily.

"Any tall young fellow work here the last few years?"

Fisher swiveled back in his creaky chair. "Lemme see, there were tall ones and young ones, but tall young ones?"

"How about customers of that description?"

"That's a big order. We get a couple hundred different people every week and some of them have to be tall and young. Law of averages—"

"Did you notice anyone in particular? Someone who made a commotion? Who got funny with Madeleine?" He was snapping the words like whips.

"Nope," said Fisher. "She knew how to handle men—never had a bit of trouble."

Maybe Ferriston was all wet. He hadn't been sober in years, prob-

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ably, and if he was lying in an alley and a midget came up to him he'd think it was a tall man. Oh, the people you met in this game!

"Well, tell them to stand by. Everybody who works here. Waiters, musicians—everybody." Then he had a thought. "How tall are *you*?"

"Shrimp. No bigger than Allie Parks." The chair creaked as Fisher stood up. "That reminds me, you see Allie's boy?"

"Allie's son?"

"No, no, just hangs around Allie. Number One fan, messenger boy, yes-man, et cetera."

"No, what's he look like?"

"Well, he's tall and young," offered Fisher. "Kind of drippy if you ask me. Wants to be a comic. Allie keeps him around for laughs."

"How come I didn't see him?" demanded the Lieutenant.

"Well, hell, he don't work here," said Fisher defensively. "I try to keep him out of the way. Gets underfoot, fools around with the girls, and so forth."

"Where's he live?"

"Must be in Allie's hotel. Allie's paying his bills, that I know."

The Lieutenant got the name of the hotel and left in a hurry. It was only a short distance away, a squat brick building with a canopied entrance. Inside, it had the institutional air usually found in places catering to transients, but the clerk behind the desk tried a smile to make it all seem homelike.

"Mr. Allie Parks?"

The clerk nodded.

"Is his assistant here too? Tall young fellow?"

"That would be . . ." The clerk consulted a card file. "Yes, Mr. Howard. But I see he checked out two hours ago."

The Lieutenant asked if Mr. Howard had said where he was going and the clerk wondered aloud why he was answering all these questions. The Lieutenant flashed the tin and the questioning proceeded. Mr. Howard was tall, thin, about twenty-five, and was wearing a sports shirt and slacks when he checked out. He'd taken a cab at the stand outside. He had mentioned he wasn't taking a plane; he didn't like to fly.

The Lieutenant went to the phone. He put two men on the trail of young Howard—to trace him, if possible, to his destination. If he took a train there was a chance they could pick up someone waiting to meet him.

The thing now was to get a warrant to search the rooms of Allie and his Number One fan. There was no point in secrecy any more. The probing operation was over—it was time now to get in with both feet.

"Hey, Lieutenant," said Rooney when he got back to the car. "Something just came over."

"Spill it."

"That drunk in the gin mill?"

The Lieutenant felt a chill. "He died?"

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"No, no. They woke him up quick down there and he's been talking a blue streak. Says the fella who hired him called somebody on the phone and said, like, 'I made the deal. Yeah, he knows the one. There'll be no mistake. She's the chanteuse that ain't French and can't sing.'"

The girl that wasn't French and couldn't sing. Allie's sour line.

"All right, back to the club. So, hold it."

Allie Parks was approaching. He wore a chocolate-brown shirt and tan slacks, and the dark glasses made him look like a huge beetle. The Lieutenant stepped into his path.

"Going back for a nap, Mr. Parks?"

"Look, please, I'm in no mood to go into Sophie's childhood," said the comedian irritably. "Later maybe."

The Lieutenant took his arm and half pulled him toward the car. Rooney flung the rear door open and the Lieutenant edged Parks inside.

"What's this, a snatch?" Parks said angrily, making room for the Lieutenant.

"We've got a line on your boy, Parks."

Parks gave him a hooded stare. "What does that make me?"

"It makes you the guy that got him to hire some bum to work that little trick."

"Me?" Parks gave a nasty laugh. "Who told you? Howard that ain't here? Or a bum that's floating in alky?"

"He's a pretty durable bum. Talks thirteen to the dozen. And your boy Howard will talk too. Even if he's your Number One fan, he's not going to carry the ball alone. No matter how much he wants to be a comic."

Parks's lip curled. "You ought to be a detective."

"Maybe you had a reason," the Lieutenant suggested. "Maybe there was more to this than met the eye."

Parks was silent. His bronzed face behind the dark glasses was expressionless. It seemed carved out of stone.

"I knew she couldn't be as sweet as all that," the Lieutenant said. "Nobody could be."

He waited.

"She was Sophie Klinger," Parks said now, tonelessly. "I made her Madeleine. She was a cow. I taught her to think different, to act different, to *be* different. But when it came right down to it, she stayed a cow."

"How's that, Allie?"

"Five long years I work with her. I spend time, I spend money, I send her to coaches, I fix her teeth, I give her class. It's like a goal I got. My own career I forget. I'm small-time, granted, but I could make a buck if I gave a damn. I didn't give a damn. Not for myself. So I train her and coach her and bring her along and get her this job—and she

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falls in love with my *pal*." His mouth twisted.

"You didn't like that," ventured the Lieutenant.

"I'm peculiar that way," said Parks. "Especially now that she don't need me any more. She had the wings I made for her, she could fly by herself. And the grand a week she was going to make in Vegas, that was going to build up this jerk I was keeping from starvation. My pal, my buddy." He spat the words.

"So I put it to him one night. Was he double-crossing me, making a play for this dame I staked out for myself? And was he using my own dough to do it? Because even the clothes he had on his back were mine. He said no, somebody gave me a wrong steer. His loyalty was to me, to my career. When I clicked big I'd pull him up with me. The dame meant nothing to him, he said. So I said fine, then let's have a laugh. I told him what to do, it would be a howl. Madeleine would drink this stuff and it would have alum or something that would make her pucker up so she wouldn't look so sophisticated. While she sang about Paris. He had to admit it was funny, but his heart wasn't in it. But he couldn't look me in the face and say no. So he does it."

"And you gave him a poison instead?"

Parks nodded. "I thought that was kind of cute. That way I got even with both double-crossers."

"What did he say when he heard she was dead?"

"It was like a kick in the belly. But I told him I had evidence she was two-timing me with some guy, after the five years I put in for her, and he didn't let out a peep." Parks shrugged contemptuously. "Imagine, I get him to kill the dame he's romancing and he just sits there."

Calmly he sat back and lit a cigarette. "So I confessed. Where does that leave you, Sheriff or Marshal or whatever you are? Put that drunk on a stand and even a shyster lawyer would murder him. And Howie won't talk. I do the thinking for both of us." He laughed. "Howie never had an original idea in his life. He's a copycat. Takes my style, my delivery, finally my dame. A couple hours ago I told him to clear out for a few months and I'd tell him when to come back. I promised him his old job of going for cigarettes. We drank on it."

He sat up suddenly, made a noise, then his head fall back. A bubbling sound came from him and the Lieutenant yanked the dark glasses off. Parks's eyes were wide and staring and his breath was coming in gasps. His hands clawed at the upholstery, digging into the leather; then, slowly, he relaxed. The Lieutenant felt for a pulse.

After a while Rooney said, "That guy's dead."

"Howie's a copycat, all right," the Lieutenant said. "Let's find him before he gets any original ideas."

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We regret that it was not our editorial privilege to "discover" Virginia Layefsky. She has had one story published before—in "Ladies Home Journal"—and now we bring you her second. "Statement of the Accused" is a story you will not forget for a long, long time—if you ever do forget it . . .

The author's formal training has been almost entirely in music. She studied at the Julliard, and before she left New York with her husband, who is a professional musician, she earned her living as a pianist. Now she and her husband move around a great deal. For six months of the year they live in Pittsburgh—for the symphony season; they spend a summer month in the British Virgin Islands, and the rest of the summer in Vermont where the author's husband is a member of the Estival String Quartet. All of which now gives Virginia Layefsky more time to write—which we fervently hope she will take advantage of . . .

"Statement of the Accused" is a devastating indictment of a certain type of motion picture currently in the vogue. We guarantee you will never see one of those movies again with quite the same feeling . . .

STATEMENT OF THE ACCUSED

by VIRGINIA LAYEFSKY

I GO EVERY FRIDAY NIGHT. I LIKE the ones best that have them girls they drag along the sand. I saw one like that once. He dragged her along the sand and they was in some desert and she was dead. She was little and long blonde hair and it dragged over the sand. And her head bumped a soft kind of bump when he dragged her down the hills and it showed her eyes was open. They just stared wide open and at first I didn't think it was a good movie because they said a different language, and the words they print at the bottom go too fast to read. But it was, and it was French I think. He was crying but I don't know why he was crying because sometimes I don't watch all the whole movie, only parts, and her blouse was tore.

And all that hair and sand and her dead made me want to laugh and shake and I did. The inside of my mouth got so dry—not from popcorn, and I had some—that I had to lick my lips. It lasted a long

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time him dragging her with her eyes open until I wanted to shout out loud. But I didn't because the usher comes then—he did before down at the Paradise—and made me leave. So I was quiet but I felt something happening to me so's I could hardly sit still. And I couldn't quit watching and I didn't want to but I licked my lips some more and moved with her over that sand, and I could feel it all hot like sand, and then somebody whispered.

I looked but she wasn't whispering to me. They all sat so still just looking at the picture and nothing happening. She was whispering to the man on her other side. He looked at me and he had on a suit and looked like the head of the shipping department, Mr. Munson, looks. And then the both of them got up and left to another seat across the aisle.

I stayed through it all over again through all that talk nobody understood and it took a long time to get back to the place where they were in the desert again. I knew just where it came though because I could feel it begin to happen and it was better that time. But after it was over the lights come on and I hated that. Everybody got up and left and I wanted to cry because I had to leave too. With the excitement still there and to go home where she was, to the apartment. I sleep in the living room because she has the bedroom but she waits up and she's my aunt.

I been living with her since I was ten and my old lady run off with a merchant marine she met in a bar one night after the divorce. And that was ten years ago. She works in a pants factory, my aunt, every day. Sometimes at home she just stares at me without a word but sometimes she goes on and on and says she didn't want me then and she don't want me now. She's always been like that; I heard about mother-in-laws and she's worse than mother-in-laws, but like one too. When she does that I think something funny: I'm not married and she's my mother-in-law!

I tell that to people. It's a joke, and sometimes they laugh and sometimes they don't. And it's a good joke but not the best joke. They tell mother-in-law jokes around the shipping office and that's the best kind. They don't tell them to me though, but I hear them. O'Shaughnessy or Jackson or Mendoza never tell me any jokes but that's because they all eat lunch together across the street. They go out together every day and they won't let me come. Jackson says Beat it, creep.

But no more jokes on me any more, they all stopped that a long time ago, a week. Mr. Munson didn't make them stop though he told them they shouldn't, like the itch powder and the match that exploded and all the lies they tell me. I made them stop. I gnashed my teeth at Jackson one day and picked

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up the shears I cut twine with and dashed them at him. And I hissed like a cat. So now they leave me alone, and I just wrap packages.

But going home on the subway is hard with all that excitement after a good movie like the girl. And I didn't stop thinking about her. I wished I had a girl like that blonde girl. She was French.

And it was late because I stayed through two double features though I slept part of the time. And there was this girl sitting right across from me on the D train and only one other man.

She was blonde too and she had on a green dress and her eyes was blue. She had her legs crossed. I could see her knees but that's all. She reminded me a lot of the movie girl and her hair was long enough to drag across the sand and I thought of it dragging. And her throat. The man choked her in the movie and the girl had a little gold chain on her throat, the girl in the subway I mean.

I looked away whenever she looked at me and pretty soon she uncrossed her legs and pulled her skirt over them. And then after one stop she got up and moved to another seat. I had to lean forward to see her and then it was harder. In the movie he held her by the ankles to pull her across the desert.

And then that blonde girl got up and went right into the next car and I was angry at her. Because I had to move and go into the next car myself before I could see her that time at all. The man kissed that girl when she was dead. It was a four star picture. I never kissed a girl was dead, but once two years ago I got to kiss a girl and other things too. But she was alive.

That girl's eyes stopped looking straight ahead and no one else came in that car. Her eyes went from side to side looking in all the corners and pretty soon they moved pretty fast though she sat still. And I thought of a funny thing I hadn't thought of before and that was I didn't have to go home. I don't like those green walls there and she wouldn't come after me, not down five flights of stairs clear from the Bronx. And I knew I could get off when the blonde got off. And just get off and decide what to do after that.

But in the end I couldn't because of the man. He was a subway man and wore the cap they wear and he came in the car just then to change the sign from Grand Concourse to Coney Island. And when he changed the sign he picked up a Daily Mirror the last man left. He would of gone away then, the guy, except the girl got up and went over to him. I was mad at her again for that.

He looked at me when she talked to him and after that he sat down right in that car and read the Daily Mirror. He was a big guy and I looked at her and then sometimes I felt him look at me.

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She didn't even stand up to go until the train was already stopped and then she picked up her purse and left so fast I had to hurry to get up. She was clear out the doors before I got to them but I would of made it except for that guy. He got up too and put his arm across the doors until they closed and looked at me. Next stop, Bud, he said. And that was all because the train started.

I looked for her other times after that but I never did see her. That was a good movie. Four stars.

But the best I ever saw was last Friday night. And you don't always get good movies, sometimes only cowboys and I don't mind them but they don't make me clench my teeth or nothing happen.

This man on TV made this movie and I watch him Tuesday nights. He shows mystery shows but beforehand he jokes and talks to his brother in a coffin or has a skull or a rope in one hand or something. All the people laugh and sometimes I do too but it makes me mad when they laugh and I don't understand. I get mad when I don't understand good.

But I knew this picture would be good because it was cinemascope and technicolor and he made it. I went right after work and I didn't go home to the old lady. I had orange drink and a hot dog at Nedick's instead. I saw it twice that night and twice Saturday night because I knew right away he was telling me something, that man, though I didn't know, not then, what it was. And it was the best I ever saw.

I'm not sure what the story was, stories are hard to figure out. And after the knife I didn't worry about the story any more or think about it. I just waited until he come again, and he come three times, running in.

And the music made sounds that prickled my skin and hurt my ears when he done that, because it was high up and sharp like screams and I've heard it before but never out loud. I didn't know anyone else ever heard that but the man on TV did and he put it right in the film enough to make you sweat. And I did.

Other people in the movie house screamed. He had a knife and he killed somebody, the first one and that was an old lady. I saw the blood on the knife and some dripping down on the floor and it was technicolor. Her eyes was open too and her hand went down pulling the curtains, it didn't let go right away. It held on and the knife didn't stop and you could see her shuddering, it hurt so much. A long knife like for cutting bread and it made you feel like a man but too much water in your mouth so I kept swallowing.

Oh, I can't stand much more of this, a girl behind me says.

And after the third time he run

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in there was more talking and then it was over and the lights come on. But I still felt high high up and clenched tight, so hard to sit still. And I knew because of that it was the best I ever saw.

People talked. The girl behind me says Let's go. She had a voice like a piece of pink ribbon I found once so I listened. And a man says What's the matter, Beth? Are you scared?

No, she says. It's disgusting that all. It's obscene.

And obscene means dirty, like the sign in the post office where you can't send dirty stuff out in the mail or they catch you. I seen that sign.

You are too scared, the man said.

No, I'm not. I just don't think they should show a picture like this, there's something wrong about it. I don't know why exactly, she says.

So he says well, we're all adults. Nobody forces us to buy a ticket.

Are we? she says. Well at least they shouldn't allow children to see this.

And he says Probably not, and then the lights went down.

Let's go she says again.

Aw come on, he says, we came in the middle, don't you want to see what happens? So they didn't go.

When it was dark I turned around to see what she looked like. She was pretty all right but she was frowning. She wasn't blonde either, her hair was brown and it was cut short. And the man with her had ahold of her hand and he had on a suit and tie with his hair combed nice. He looked like Mr. Munson.

But I forgot them when the show come on. It was even better the second time and the girl in it was a blonde, like that other movie. And she walked around in a black brassiere and high heels talking to a man and I liked seeing her like that. It made me feel like running fast and shouting loud and I couldn't get my breath. I seen my aunt like that once and others too, but the others only through windows. And I knew later on that girl would be dead like the old lady and blood on the floor and her hair spread out on the rug and it would show blood in it. And I wished he would drag her through the sand a long ways like that. But that was a different movie.

It started right then, when I thought about that and I could feel it starting but nothing happened until he run in the second time with the knife and killed the blonde. Then I couldn't help myself. Sometimes, like then, it comes too strong. I had to shout and I *did* shout the way he wanted to. I shouted loud and I could feel the way I bowed back and forth with it.

Someone beside me started to stand up but then the usher came, like they do, and took my arm. So

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went with him like I done last me. And he walked me right out ıe door and I knew it was wrong ɔ shout in the movie like that.

And he looked at me like Jack-ɔn and O'Shaughnessy and Men-oza, like they always look.

Don't come back again, Mac, he ıys. We don't want you here.

I walked all the way home that ight because I was too excited to ide. And things weren't clear yet ıough I knew I had somethings ɔ do.

And then *she* was up, my aunt, itting in her chair, looking at me. ınd things weren't clear so I went ɔ bed without even telling her ello and she kept sitting there.

But after Friday it's Saturday so ɔday I bought the knife. I saw it ı the window of a pawnshop ⁄hen I was walking and just when saw it I knew I would need it. It ⁄asn't a bread knife but all the ame it was a peach. It had a leather ıolster and both sides of it was harp and a pointed tip. So I ought it. I paid five dollars and ⁄orth it.

And then it was late and time for upper and I put it under my shirt ɔ's I could feel it bumping against ne while I walked, like a little ıead over sand.

I went into the Automat because was hungry then and had my avorite: beefsteak pie, side of auerkraut, baked beans and after-vard cherry pie. But not coffee. I lon't like coffee.

And after that I found another movie house where they shown that same movie and seen it twice more. And it was better this time because of my very own knife bumping my chest and twice as exciting. When it come time to shout I held on tight and put my hands over my mouth and this time it was so quiet no one heard it though, because I couldn't made me shake.

And this time I knew the old lady in it must be the mother-in-law. I knew before they are all bad because of those jokes and they hate you like a girl in another movie I seen said. But this movie showed me how bad they really was.

So it was pretty clear all right and it would of worked out except for that long walk from the subway to the apartment afterwards. It's six blocks and dark because it was so late and all the people's lights were off because they was in bed. And there she was walking all alone a block ahead of me. She had on high heels that were noisy and she was going pretty fast, looking from side to side but not behind. And when I got closer I knew she was too young to be anybody's mother-in-law. And I *knew* that.

But then she had a blonde pony-tail and things got mixed up again. I guess she heard my footsteps because she looked around and began to walk faster and then she began to run. And I run then and she

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looked around and screamed. The scream was better than that whole movie and better than anything. It made me shout. And then I just couldn't help it with the knife already in my hand.

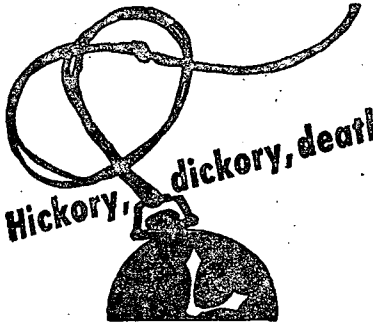
And then later somebody must have called them because I was still walking around later that night and they pulled up in a shiny car. All the way downtown they didn't listen to me good, not like this anyway, and the detective later wouldn't listen either unless they ask you a question.

But I seen a picture once in the Daily Mirror of a guy that killed a girl and it was on the front page. And I read what he said. And I would like to say the same thing to you fellas now so you can write it down and put my picture in the front page like you done his.

Just put that I tell the parents I'm very sorry what I done and I don't know what come over me. Everything went black. And that's what he said, the other guy.

And I guess there isn't anything more to say except I guess all the guys down at the shipping office will be reading this tomorrow, and Mr. Munson, because it will all be on the front page. My picture.

So I would like you to put that I say hello to all of them and I don't hold no grudges. And put that I'm sorry I done it, and I feel fine.



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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **AGATHA CHRISTIE**

TITLE: ***Hercule Poirot in Hell***

TYPE: Detective Story

LOCALE: London

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *How Hercule Poirot, of the little gray cells, completed the Twelfth Labor of Hercules—The Capture of Cerberus—by invading a Hell on earth . . .*

HERCULE POIROT, SWAYING TO AND fro in the tube train, thrown now against one body, now against another, thought to himself that there were too many people in the world! Certainly there were too many people in the underground world of London at this particular moment—6:30 p.m. of the evening.

Hemmed in and pressed around by strangers—and on the whole, he thought distastefully, a plain and uninteresting lot of strangers. Humanity seen thus *en masse* was not attractive. How seldom did one see a face sparkling with intelligence, how seldom a *femme bien mise!*

And what was this passion that attacked women for knitting under the most unpropitious conditions? A woman did not look her best knitting; the absorption, the glassy eyes, the restless busy fingers! One needed the agility of a wildcat and the will power of a Napoleon to manage to knit in a crowded tube, but women managed it.

No repose, thought Poirot, no feminine grace! His elderly soul revolted from the stress and hurry of the modern world. All these young women who surrounded him—so alike, so devoid of charm, so lacking in rich, alluring femininity! He demanded a more flamboyant appeal. Ah, to see a *femme du monde, chic, spirituelle*—a woman with ample curves, a wom-

© 1947 by Agatha Christie; originally published in "This Week" under title, "Meet Me In Hell."

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in ridiculously and extravagantly dressed! Once there had been such women. But now—now—

The train stopped at a station; people surged out, forcing Poirot back onto the points of knitting needles; surged in, squeezing him into even more sardine-like proximity with his fellow passengers.

The train started off again with a jerk, Poirot was thrown against a stout woman with knobby parcels, said, "*Pardon!*" bounced off again into a long angular man whose attaché case caught him in the small of the back. He said, "*Pardon!*" again. He felt his mustaches becoming limp and uncurled. *Quel enfer!* Fortunately the next station was his.

It was also the station for about a hundred and fifty other people, since it happened to be Piccadilly Circus. Like a great tidal wave they flowed out onto the platform. Presently Poirot was again jammed tightly on an escalator, being carried upward toward the surface of the earth.

Up, thought Poirot, from the Infernal Regions . . .

At that moment a voice cried his name. Startled, he raised his eyes. On the opposite escalator, the one descending, his unbelieving eyes saw a vision from the past. A woman of full and flamboyant form; her luxuriant henna-red hair crowned with a small plastron of straw to which was attached a positive platoon of brilliantly feathered little birds. Exotic-looking furs dripped from her shoulders.

Her crimson mouth opened wide, her rich foreign voice echoed resoundingly.

"It *is!*" she screamed. "But it is! *Mon cher Hercule Poirot!* We must meet again! I insist!"

But Fate itself is not more inexorable than the behavior of two escalators moving in opposite directions. Steadily, remorselessly, Hercule Poirot was borne upward, and the Countess Vera Rossakoff was borne downward.

Twisting himself sideways, leaning over the balustrade, Poirot cried despairingly, "*Chère Madame,* where then can I find you?"

Her reply came to him faintly from the depths. It was unexpected, yet seemed at the moment strangely apposite.

"In Hell."

Hercule Poirot blinked. He blinked again. Suddenly he rocked on his feet. Unawares he had reached the top—and had neglected to step off properly.

The crowd spread out round him. A little to one side a dense crowd was pressing onto the downward escalator. Should he join them? Had that been the Countess's meaning? No doubt that traveling in the bowels of the earth at the rush hour *was* hell. If that had been the Countess's meaning, he could not agree with her more.

Resolutely Poirot crossed over, sandwiched himself into the de-

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scending crowd, and was borne back into the depths. At the foot of the escalator there was no sign of the Countess. Poirot was left with a choice of blue, amber, and other lights to follow.

Was the Countess patronizing the Bakerloo or the Piccadilly line? Poirot visited each platform in turn. He was swept about among surging crowds boarding or leaving trains—but nowhere did he espy that flamboyant Russian figure, the Countess Vera Rossákoff.

Weary, battered, and infinitely chagrined, Hercule Poirot once more ascended to ground level and stepped out into the hubbub of Piccadilly Circus. He reached home in a mood of pleasurable excitement.

It is the misfortune of small, precise men to hanker after large and flamboyant women. Poirot had never been able to rid himself of the fatal fascination the Countess held for him. Though it was something like twenty years since he had seen her last, the magic still held.

Granted that her make-up now resembled a scene painter's sunset, to Hercule Poirot she still represented the sumptuous and the alluring. The little bourgeois was still thrilled by the aristocrat. The memory of the adroit way she stole jewelry roused the old admiration. He remembered the magnificent aplomb with which she had admitted the fact when taxed with it. A woman in a thousand—in a million! And he had met her again—

"In hell," she had said. Surely his ears had not deceived him? She *had* said that?

Hercule Poirot was brought up short against bewilderment. What an intriguing, what an unpredictable woman! A lesser woman might have shrieked "The Ritz" or "Claridge's." But Vera Rossakoff had cried poignantly and impossibly, "Hell!"

Poirot sighed. But he was not defeated. In his perplexity he took the simplest and most straightforward course. On the following morning he asked his secretary, Miss Lemon.

Miss Lemon was unbelievably ugly and incredibly efficient. To her Poirot was nobody in particular—he was merely her employer. She gave him excellent service. Her private thoughts and dreams were concentrated on a new filing system which she was slowly perfecting in the recesses of her mind.

"Miss Lemon, may I ask you a question?"

"Of course, M. Poirot." Miss Lemon took her fingers off the typewriter keys and waited attentively.

"If a friend asked you to meet her—or him—in hell, what would you do?"

Miss Lemon, as usual, did not pause.

"It would be advisable, I think, to ring up for a table," she said.

Hercule Poirot stared at her in a stupefied fashion.

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He said, staccato, "You—would—ring—up—for—a—table?"

Miss Lemon nodded and drew the telephone toward her.

"Tonight?" she asked, and taking assent for granted since he did not speak, she dialed briskly.

"Temple Bar 14578? Is that Hell? Will you please reserve a table for two. M. Hercule Poirot. Eleven o'clock."

She replaced the receiver and her fingers hovered over the keys of her typewriter. A slight—a very slight look of impatience was discernible on her face. She had done her part, the look seemed to say; surely her employer could now leave her to get on with what she was doing?

But Hercule Poirot required explanations.

"What is it then, this Hell?" he demanded.

Miss Lemon looked slightly surprised.

"Oh, didn't you know, M. Poirot? It's a night club—quite new and very much the rage at present. Run by some Russian woman, I believe. I can fix up for you to become a member before this evening quite easily."

Whereupon, having wasted (as she made obvious) quite enough time, Miss Lemon broke into a perfect fusillade of efficient typing.

At eleven that evening Hercule Poirot passed through a doorway over which a neon sign discreetly showed one letter at a time. A gentleman in red tails received him and took his coat.

A gesture directed him to a flight of wide, shallow stairs leading downward. On each step a phrase was written.

The first one ran: *I meant well.*

The second: *Wipe the slate clean and start afresh.*

The third: *I can give it up any time I like.*

"The good intentions that pave the way to hell," Hercule Poirot murmured appreciatively. "*C'est bien imagine, ça!*"

He descended the stairs. At the foot was a tank of water with scarlet lilies. Spanning it was a bridge, shaped like a boat. Poirot crossed over.

On his left, in a kind of marble grotto, sat the largest and ugliest and blackest dog Poirot had ever seen! It sat up very straight and gaunt and immovable. It was perhaps, he thought (and hoped), not real. But at that moment the dog turned its ferocious and ugly head and from the depths of its black body a low, rumbling growl was emitted. It was a terrifying sound.

And then Poirot noticed a decorative basket of small round dog biscuits. They were labeled: *A sop for Cerberus!*

It was on them that the dog's eyes were fixed. Once again the low rumbling growl was heard. Hastily Poirot picked up a biscuit and tossed it toward the great hound.

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A cavernous red mouth yawned; then came a snap as the powerful jaws closed again. Poirot moved on through an open doorway.

The room was not a big one. It was dotted with little tables, a dancing floor in the middle. It was lighted with small red lamps; there were frescoes on the walls and at the far end was a vast grill at which officiated chefs dressed as devils with tails and horns.

All this Poirot took in before, with all the impulsiveness of her Russian nature, Countess Vera Rossakoff, resplendent in scarlet evening dress, bore down on him, with outstretched hands.

"Ah, you have come! My dear—my *very* dear friend! What a joy to see you again! After such years—so—many—how many? No, we will not say how many! To me it seems but as yesterday. You have not changed—not in the least have you changed!"

"Nor you, *chère amie,*" Poirot exclaimed, bowing over her hand.

Nevertheless, he was full conscious now that twenty years is twenty years. Countess Rossakoff might not uncharitably have been described as a ruin. But she was at least a spectacular ruin. The exuberance, the full-blooded enjoyment of life was still there, and she knew, none better, how to flatter a man.

She drew Poirot to a table at which two other people were sitting.

"My friend, my celebrated friend, M. Hercule Poirot," she announced. "He who is the terror of evildoers! I was once afraid of him myself, but now I lead a life of the extreme, the most virtuous dullness. Is it not so?"

The tall, thin elderly man to whom she spoke said, "Never say dull, Countess."

"The Professor Liskard," the Countess announced. "He who knows everything about the past and who gave me the valuable hints for the decorations here."

The archeologist shuddered slightly.

"If I'd known what you meant to do!" he murmured. "The result is so appalling."

Poirot observed the frescoes more closely. On the wall facing him, Orpheus and his jazz band played, while Eurydice looked hopefully toward the grill. On the opposite wall, Osiris and Isis seemed to be throwing an Egyptian underworld boating party. On the third wall some bright young people were enjoying mixed bathing in a state of nature.

"The Country of the Young," explained the Countess and added in the same breath, completing her introductions, "And this is my little Alice."

Poirot bowed to a second occupant of the table, a severe-looking girl in a check coat and skirt. She wore horn-rimmed glasses.

"She is very, very clever," said

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Countess Rossakoff. "She has a degree and she is a psychologist and she knows all the reasons why lunatics are lunatics! It is not, as you might think, because they are mad! No, there are all sorts of other reasons. I find that very peculiar."

The girl called Alice smiled kindly but a little disdainfully. She asked the Professor in a firm voice if he would like to dance. He appeared flattered but dubious.

"My dear young lady, I fear I only waltz."

"This *is* a waltz," said Alice patiently.

They got up and danced. They did not dance well.

The Countess Rossakoff sighed. Following out a train of thought of her own, she murmured, "And yet she is not *really* bad-looking . . ."

"She does not make the most of herself," said Poirot judicially.

"Frankly," cried the Countess, "I cannot understand the young people of nowadays. They do not try any more to please—always, in my youth, I tried—the colors that suited me—a little padding in the frocks—the corset laced tight round the waist—the hair, perhaps, a more interesting shade—"

She pushed back the heavy Titian tresses from her forehead—it was undeniable that she, at least, was still trying and trying hard!

"To be content with what nature has given you, that—that is *stupid!* It is also arrogant! The little Alice she writes pages of long words about sex, but how often, I ask you, does a man suggest to her that they should go to Brighton for the week-end? It is all long words and work, and the welfare of the workers, and the future of the world. It is very worthy, but I ask you, is it gay? And look, I ask you, how drab these young people have made the world! It is all regulations and prohibitions! Not so when I was young."

"That reminds me, how is your son, Madame?" At the last moment he substituted "son," for "little boy," remembering that twenty years had passed.

The Countess's face lit up with enthusiastic motherhood.

"The beloved angel! So big now, such shoulders, so handsome! He is in America. He builds there—bridges, banks, hotels, department stores, railways, anything the Americans want!"

Poirot looked slightly puzzled.

"He is then an engineer? Or an architect?"

"What does it matter?" demanded the Countess. "He is adorable! He is wrapped up in iron girders, and machinery, and things called stresses. The kind of things that I have never understood in the least. But we adore each other—always we adore each other! And so for his sake I adore the little Alice. But, yes, they are engaged. They meet on a plane or a boat or a train, and they fall in love, all in the midst of talking about the welfare of the

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workers. And when she comes to London she comes to see me and I take her to my heart."

The Countess clasped her arms across her vast bosom, "And I say, 'You and Niki love each other—so I too love you—but if you love him why do you leave him in America?' And she talks about her 'job' and the book she is writing and her career, and frankly I do not understand, but I have always said one must be tolerant." She added all in one breath, "And what do you think, *cher ami*, of all this that I have imagined here?"

"It is very well imagined," said Poirot, looking round him approvingly. "It is *chic!*"

The place was full and it had that unmistakable air of success which cannot be counterfeited. There were languid couples in full evening dress, Bohemians in corduroy trousers, stout gentlemen in business suits. The band, dressed as devils, dispensed hot music. No doubt about it, the night club called Hell had caught on.

"We have all kinds here," said the Countess. "That is as it should be, is it not? The gates of hell are open to all?"

"Except, possibly, to the poor?" Poirot suggested.

The Countess laughed.

"Are we not told that it is difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven? Naturally, then, he should have priority in hell."

The Professor and Alice were returning to the table. The Countess got up.

"I must speak to Aristide."

She exchanged some words with the head waiter, a lean Mephistopheles, then went round from table to table, speaking to the guests.

The Professor, wiping his forehead and sipping a glass of wine, remarked, "She is a personality, is she not? People feel it."

He excused himself as he went over to speak to someone at another table. Poirot, left alone with the severe Alice, felt slightly embarrassed as he met the cold blue of her eyes. He recognizd that she was actually quite good-looking, but he found her distinctly alarming.

"I do not yet know your last name," he murmured.

"Cunningham. Doctor Alice Cunningham. You have known Vera in past days, I understand?"

"Twenty years ago it must be."

"I find her a very interesting study," said Dr. Alice Cunningham. "Naturally I am interested in her as the mother of the man I am going to marry, but I am interested in her from the professional standpoint as well."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. I am writing a book on criminal psychology. I find the night life of this place very illuminating. We have several criminal types who come here regularly. I have discussed their early life with

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some of them. Of course, you know all about Vera's criminal tendencies —I mean that she steals?"

"Why, yes—I know that," said Poirot, slightly taken aback.

"I call it the Magpie complex myself. She takes, you know, always glittering things. Never money. Always jewels. I find that as a child she was petted and indulged but very much shielded. Life was unendurably dull for her—dull and safe. Her nature demanded drama —it craved for *punishment*. That is at the root of her indulgence in theft. She wants the importance, the notoriety of being *punished!*"

Poirot objected, "Her life can surely not have been safe and dull as a member of the *ancien régime* in Russia during the Revolution?"

A look of faint amusement showed in Miss Cunningham's pale blue eyes.

"Ah," she said. "A member of the *ancien régime?* She has told you that?"

"She is undeniably an aristocrat," said Poirot staunchly, fighting back certain uneasy memories of the wildly varying accounts of her early life told him by the Countess herself.

"One believes what one wishes to believe," remarked Miss Cunningham, casting a professional eye on him.

Poirot felt alarmed. In a moment, he felt, he would be told what was *his* complex. He decided to carry the war into the enemy's camp. He enjoyed the Countess Rossakoff's society partly because of her aristocratic provenance, and he was not going to have his enjoyment spoiled by a spectacled little girl with boiled gooseberry eyes and a degree in psychology!

"Do you know what I find astonishing me?" he asked.

Alice Cunningham did not admit in so many words that she did *not* know. She contented herself with looking bored but indulgent.

Poirot went on, "It amazes me that you—who are young, and who could look pretty if you took the trouble—well, it amazes me that you do *not* take the trouble! You wear the heavy coat and skirt with the big pockets as though you were going to play the game of golf. But it is not here, the golf links, it is the underground cellar and your nose it is hot and shines, but you do not powder it, and the lipstick you put it on your mouth without interest, without emphasizing the curve of the lips! You are a woman, but you do not draw attention to the fact of being a woman. And I say to you, 'Why Not'? It is a pity!"

For a moment he had the satisfaction of seeing Alice Cunningham look human. He even saw a spark of anger in her eyes. Then she regained her smiling contempt.

"My dear M. Poirot," she said, "I'm afraid you're out of touch with the modern ideology. It is *fundamentals* that matter—not the trappings."

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She looked up as a dark and very beautiful young man came toward them.

"This is a most interesting type," she murmured with zest. "Paul Varesco! Lives on women and has strange depraved cravings! I want him to tell me more about a nursery governess who looked after him when he was three years old."

A moment or two later she was dancing with the young man. He danced divinely. As they drifted near Poirot's table, Poirot heard her say, "And after the summer at Bognor she gave you a toy crane? A *crane*—yes, that's very suggestive."

For a moment Poirot allowed himself to toy with the speculation that Miss Cunningham's interest in criminal types might lead one day to her mutilated body being found in a lonely wood. He did not like Alice Cunningham, but he was honest enough to realize that the reason for his dislike was the fact that she was so palpably unimpressed by Hercule Poirot!

Then he saw something that momentarily put Alice Cunningham out of his head.

At a table on the opposite side of the floor sat a fair-haired young man. He wore evening dress, his hair shone, his mustache was such as the Guards affect, his whole demeanor was that of one who lived a life of ease and pleasure. Opposite him sat the right kind of expensive girl.

He was gazing at her in a fatuous and foolish manner. Anyone seeing them might have murmured: The idle rich! Nevertheless Poirot knew very well that the young man was neither rich nor idle.

He was, in fact, Detective-Inspector Charles Stevens, and it seemed probable to Poirot that Detective-Inspector Stevens was here on business.

On the following morning Poirot paid a visit to Scotland Yard to his old friend, Chief Inspector Japp.

Japp's reception of his tentative inquiries was unexpected.

"You old fox!" said Japp affectionately. "How you get on to these things beats me!"

"But I assure you I know nothing —nothing at all. It is just idle curiosity."

Japp said that Poirot could tell that to the Marines.

"You want to know all about this place Hell? Well, on the surface it's just another of these things. It's caught on. They must be making a lot of money, though of course the expenses are pretty high. There's a Russian woman ostensibly running it, calls herself the Countess Something or other—"

"I am acquainted with Countess Rossakoff," said Poirot. "We are old friends."

"But she's just a dummy," Japp went on. "She didn't put up the money. It might be the head waiter

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chap, Aristide Paaopolous—he's got an interest in it—but we don't believe it's really his show either. In fact, we don't know *whose* show it is!"

"And Inspector Stevens goes there to find out?"

"Oh, you saw Stevens, did you? Lucky young dog, landing a job like that at the taxpayers' expense! A fat lot he's found out so far!"

"What do you suspect?"

"Dope! Drug racket on a large scale. And the dope's being paid for not in money, M. Poirot, but in precious stones."

"Aha?"

"This is how it goes. Lady Blank—or the Countess of Whatnot—finds it hard to get hold of cash. And in any case she doesn't want to draw large sums out of the bank. But she's got jewels—family heirlooms. They're taken along to a place for 'cleaning' or 'resetting'—there the stones are taken out of their settings and replaced with paste. The unset stones are sold over here or on the Continent. It's all plain sailing—there's been no robbery, no hue and cry after them. Say sooner or later it's discovered that a certain tiara or necklace is a fake? Lady Blank is all innocence and dismay—can't imagine how or when the substitution can have taken place—necklace has never been out of her possession! Sends the poor perspiring police off on wild goose chases after dismissed maids or doubtful butlers.

"But we're not quite so dumb as these social birds think! We had several cases come up one after another. *And we found a common factor*—all the women showed signs of dope—nerves, irritability, twitching, pupils of eyes dilated. Question was: Where were they getting the dope from and who was running the racket?"

"And the answer, you think, is this place Hell?"

"We believe it's the headquarters of the whole racket. We've discovered where the work on the jewelry is done—a place called Golconda, Limited—respectable enough on the surface, high-class imitation jewelry. There's a nasty bit of work called Paul Varesco—ah, I see you know him?"

"I have seen him—in Hell."

"That's where I'd like to see him—in the real place! He's as bad as they make 'em—but women, even decent women, eat out of his hand. He's got some kind of connection with Golconda, and I'm pretty sure he's the man behind Hell. It's ideal for his purpose—eveyone goes there, society women, professional crooks—it's the perfect meeting place."

"You think the exchange—jewels for dope—takes place there?"

"Yes. We know the Golconda side of it—we want the other, the dope side. We want to know who's supplying the stuff and where it's coming from."

"And so far you have no idea?"

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"I think it's the Russian woman —but we've no evidence. A few weeks ago we thought we were getting somewhere. Varesco went to the Golconda place, picked up some stones there, and went straight from there to Hell. Stevens was watching him, but he didn't actually see him pass the stuff. When Varesco left we picked him up—the stones weren't on him. We raided the club, rounded up everybody. Result: no stones, no dope!"

"A fiasco, in fact?"

Japp winced. "You're telling me! Might have got in a bit of a jam, but luckily in the roundup we got Peverel—you know, the Battersea murderer. Pure luck—he was supposed to have got away to Scotland. One of our smart sergeants spotted him from his photos. So all's well that ends well—kudos for us—terrific publicity for the club—it's been more packed than ever since!"

Poirot said, "But it does not advance the dope inquiry. There is, perhaps, a place of concealment on the premises?"

"Must be. But we couldn't find it. Went over the place with a toothcomb. And between you and me, there's been an unofficial search as well." He winked. "Strictly on the Q.T. Spot of breaking and entering. Not a success; our 'unofficial' man nearly got torn to pieces by that ruddy great dog! It sleeps on the premises."

"Aha, Cerberus?"

"Yes. Silly name for a dog. Suppose you try your hand at it, Poirot It's a pretty problem and worth doing. I hate the drug racket—destroys people body and soul. That really is hell, if you like!"

Poirot murmured meditatively "It would round off things—yes . . . Do you know what the twelfth labor of Hercules was?"

"No idea."

"The Capture of Cerberus. It is appropriate, is it not?"

"Don't know what you're talking about, old man, but remember *Dog eats man* is news." And Japp leaned back roaring with laughter

"I wish to speak to you with the utmost seriousness," said Poirot.

The hour was early, the club as yet nearly empty. The Countess and Poirot sat at a small table near the doorway.

"But I do not feel serious," she protested. *"La petite Alice,* she is always serious and, *entre nous,* I find it very boring. My poor Niki what fun will he have? None."

"I entertain for you much affection," continued Poirot, steadily "And I do not want to see you in what is called the jam."

"But it is absurd, what you say! I am on the top of the world, the money it rolls in!"

"You own this place?"

The Countess's eye became slightly evasive.

"Certainly," she replied.

"But you have a partner?"

"Who told you that?"

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"Is your partner Paul Varesco?"

"Oh! Paul Varesco! What an idea!"

"He has a criminal record. Do you realize that you have criminals frequenting this place?"

The Countess burst out laughing.

"There speaks the *bon bourgeois!* Naturally I realize! Do you not see that that is half the attraction of this place? These young people from Mayfair—they get tired of seeing their own kind round them in the West End. They come here, they see the criminals; the thief, the blackmailer, the confidence trickster—perhaps, even, the murderer—the man who will be in the Sunday papers next week! It is exciting, that—they think they are seeing life! So does the prosperous man who all the week sells the stockings, the shoes! What a change from his respectable life and his respectable friends! And then, a further thrill—there at a table, stroking his mustache, is the Inspector from Scotland Yard—an Inspector in tails!"

"So you knew that?" said Poirot softly.

Her eyes met his and she smiled.

"Mon cher ami, I am not so simple as you seem to suppose!"

"Do you also deal in drugs here?"

"Ah, ça non!" The Countess spoke sharply. "That would be an abomination!"

Poirot sighed.

"I believe you," he said. "But in that case it is all the more necessary that you tell me who really owns this place."

"I own it," she snapped.

"On paper, yes. But there is someone behind you."

"Do you know, *mon ami,* I find you altogether too curious. Is he not much too curious, Dou-dou?"

Her voice dropped to a coo as she spoke the last words and she threw the duck bone from her plate to the big black hound who caught it with a ferocious snap of the jaws.

"What is that you call that animal?" asked Poirot.

"C'est mon petit Dou-dou!"

"But it is ridiculous, a name like that!"

"But he is adorable! He is a police dog! He can do anything—anything—Wait!"

She rose, looked round her, and suddenly snatched up a plate with a large succulent steak which had just been deposited before a diner at a nearby table. She crossed to the marble niche and put the plate down in front of the dog, uttering a few words in Russian.

Cerberus gazed in front of him. The steak might not have existed.

"You see? And it is not just a matter of *minutes!* No, he will remain like that for *hours* if need be!"

Then she murmured a word and Cerberus bent his long neck and the steak disappeared as though by magic.

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Vera Rossakoff flung her arms around the dog's neck and embraced him passionately, rising on tiptoe to do so.

"See how gentle he can be!" she cried. "For me, for Alice, for his friends—they can do what they like! But one has but to give him the word and presto! I can assure you he would tear a—police inspector, for instance—into little pieces!"

She burst out laughing.

"I would have but to say the word—"

Poirot interrupted hastily. He mistrusted the Countess's sense of humor. Inspector Stevens might be in real danger.

"Professor Liskard wants to speak to you."

The Professor was standing reproachfully at her elbow.

"You took my steak," he complained. "Why did you take my steak? It was a good steak!"

"Thursday night, old man," said Japp. "That's when the balloon goes up. It's Andrews' pigeon, of course—Narcotic Squad—but he'll be delighted to have you horn in. No, thanks, I won't have any of your fancy *sirops*. I have to take care of my stomach. Is that whiskey I see over there? That's more the ticket!"

Setting his glass down, he went on, "We've solved the problem, I think. There's another way out of that club—and we've found it!"

"Where?"

"Behind the grill. Part of it swings round."

"But surely you would see—"

"No, old boy. When the raid started, the lights went out—switched off at the main—and it took us a minute or two to get them turned on again. Nobody got out the front way because it was being watched, but it's clear now that somebody could have nipped out by the secret way with the doings. We've been examining the house behind the club—and that's how we tumbled to the trick."

"And you proposed to do—what?"

Japp winked. "Let it go according to plan—the police appear, the lights go out—and somebody's waiting on the other side of that secret door to see who comes through. This time we've *got* 'em!"

"Why Thursday?"

Again Japp winked. "We've got the Golconda pretty well taped now. There will be stuff going out of there on Thursday. Lady Carrington's emeralds."

"You permit," said Poirot, "that I, too, make one or two little arrangements?"

Sitting at his usual small table near the entrance on Thursday night, Poirot studied his surroundings.

The Countess was even more flamboyantly made up than usual, very Russian tonight, clapping her hands and screaming with laughter. Paul Varesco had arrived.

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Sometimes he wore faultless evening dress, sometimes, as tonight, he chose to present himself in a kind of apache get-up, tightly buttoned coat, scarf round the neck. He looked vicious and attractive. Detaching himself from a stout middle-aged woman plastered with diamonds, he leaned over Alice Cunningham, who was sitting at a table writing busily in a little notebook, and asked her to dance. The stout woman scowled at Alice and eyed Varesco adoringly.

There was no adoration in Miss Cunningham's eyes. They gleamed with pure scientific interest, and Poirot caught fragments of their conversation as they danced past him. She had progressed beyond the nursery governess and was now seeking information about the matron at Paul's preparatory school.

When the music stopped, she sat down by Poirot, looking happy and excited.

"Most interesting," she said. "Varesco will be one of the most important cases in my book. The symbolism is unmistakable. Trouble about the vests, for instance—for vest read hair shirt with all its associations—and the whole thing becomes quite plain. He's a definitely criminal type but a cure *can* be effected—"

"That she can reform a rake," said Poirot, "has always been one of woman's dearest illusions!"

Alice Cunningham looked at him coldly.

"There is nothing personal about this, M. Poirot."

"There never is," said Poirot. "It is always pure disinterested altruism—but the object of it is usually an attractive member of the opposite sex. Are you interested, for instance, in where *I* went to school, or what was the attitude of the matron to *me?*"

"You are not a criminal type," said Miss Cunningham.

"Do you know a criminal type when you see one?"

"Certainly I do."

Professor Liskard joined them. He sat down by Poirot.

"Are you talking about criminals? You should study the criminal code of Hammurabi, M. Poirot. 1800 b.c. Most interesting. The man who is caught stealing during a fire shall be thrown into the fire."

He stared pleasurably ahead of him toward the electric grill.

"And there are older, Summerian laws. If a wife hateth her husband and saith unto him 'Thou are not my husband,' they shall throw her into the river. Cheaper and easier than the divorce court. But if a husband says that to his wife he only has to pay her a certain measure of silver. Nobody throws *him* in the river."

"The same old story," said Alice Cunningham. "One law for the man and one for the woman."

"Women, of course, have a greater appreciation of monetary value," said the Professor thoughtfully.

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"You know," he added, "I like this place. I come here most evenings. I don't have to pay. The Countess arranged that—very nice of her—in consideration of my having advised her about the decorations, she says. Not that they're anything to do with me really—I'd no idea what she was asking me questions for—and naturally she and the artist have got everything *quite* wrong. I hope nobody will ever know I had the remotest connection with the dreadful things. I should never live it down. But she's a wonderful woman—rather like a Babylonian, I always think. The Babylonians were good women of business, you know—"

The Professor's words were drowned in a sudden chorus. The word "Police" was heard—women rose to their feet and there was a babel of sound. The lights went out and so did the electric grill.

As an undertone to the turmoil, the Professor's voice went on tranquilly reciting various excerpts from the laws of Hammurabi.

When the lights went on again, Hercule Poirot was halfway up the wide, shallow steps. The police officers by the door saluted him, and he passed out into the street and strolled to the corner. Just around the corner, pressed against the wall, was a small man with a red nose. He spoke in an anxious, husky whisper.

"I'm 'ere, guv'nor. Time for me to do my stuff?"

"Yes. Go on."

"There's an awful lot of coppers about!"

"That is all right. They've been told about you."

"I 'ope they won't interfere, that's all?"

"They will not interfere. You're sure you can accomplish what you have set out to do? The animal in question is both large and fierce."

"'E won't be fierce to me," said the little man confidently. "Not with what I've got 'ere! Any dog'll follow me to hell for it!"

"In this case," murmured Hercule Poirot, "he has to follow you out of Hell!"

In the small hours of the morning the telephone rang. Poirot picked up the receiver.

Japp's voice said, "You asked me to ring you."

"Yes, indeed. *Eh bien?*"

"No dope—but we got the emeralds."

"Where?"

"In Professor Liskard's pocket."

"Professor Liskard?"

"Surprises you, too? Frankly I don't know what to think. He looked as astonished as a baby, stared at them, said he hadn't the faintest idea how they got in his pocket, and dammit, I believe he was speaking the truth! Varesco could have slipped them into his pocket easily enough in the blackout. I can't see a man like old Liskard being mixed up in this sort

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of business. He belongs to all these highfalutin' societies. Why, he's even connected with the British Museum! The only thing he ever spends money on is books, and musty old second-hand books at that. No, he doesn't fit. I'm beginning to think we're wrong about the whole thing—there never has been any dope in that club."

"Oh, yes, there has, my friend. It was there tonight. Tell me, did no one come out through your secret way?"

"Yes, Prince Henry of Scandenberg and his equerry—he only arrived in England yesterday. Vitamian Evans, the Cabinet Minister, and Lady Beatrice Viner was the last—she's getting married the day after tomorrow to the priggish young Duke of Leominster. I don't believe any of that lot was mixed up in this."

"You believe rightly. Nevertheless, the dope *was* in the club and someone took it out of the club."

"Who did?"

"I did, *mon ami,*" said Poirot softly.

He replaced the receiver, cutting off Japp's spluttering noises, as a bell trilled out. He went and opened the front door. The Countess Rossakoff sailed in.

"If it were not that we are, alas, too old, how compromising this would be!" she exclaimed. "You see, I have come, as you told me to do in your note. There is, I think, a policeman behind me, but he can stay in the street. And now, my friend, what is it?"

Poirot gallantly relieved her of her furs.

"Why did you put those emeralds in Professor Liskard's pocket?" he demanded. *"Ce n'est pas gentille, ce que vous avez fait la!"*

The Countess's eyes opened wide.

"Naturally, it was in *your* pocket I meant to put the emeralds!"

"Oh, in *my* pocket?"

"Certainly. I cross hurriedly to the table where you usually sit—but the lights they are out and I suppose, by inadvertence, I put them in the Professor's pocket."

"And why did you wish to put stolen emeralds in my pocket?"

"It seemed to me—I had to think quickly, you understand—the best thing to do!"

"Really, Vera, you are *impayable!*"

"But, dear friend, *consider!* The police arrive, the lights go out—our little private arrangement for the patrons who must not be embarrassed—and a hand takes my bag off the table. I snatch it back, but I feel through the velvet something hard inside. I slip my hand in, I find what I know by touch to be jewels, and I comprehend at once who has put them there!"

"Oh, you do?"

"Of course I do! It is that lizard, that monster, that double-faced, double-crossing squiriming adder of a pig's son, Paul Varesco."

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"The man who is your partner in Hell?"

"Yes, yes, it is he who owns the place, who put up the money. Until now I do not betray him—I can keep faith, me! But now that he double-crosses me, that he tries to embroil me with the police—ah! now I will spit his name out—yes, *spit* it out!"

"Calm yourself," said Poirot, "and come with me into the next room."

He opened the door. It was a small room and seemed for a moment to be completely filled with a dog. Cerberus had looked outsized even in the spacious premises of Hell. In the tiny dining-room of Poirot's service flat there seemed nothing else but Cerberus in the room. There was also, however, the small man with a red nose.

"We've turned up here according to plan, guv'nor," said the little man in a husky voice.

"Dou-dou!" screamed the Countess. "My angel Dou-dou!"

Cerberus beat the floor with his tail—but he did not move.

"Let me introduce you to Mr. William Higgs," shouted Poirot, above the thunder of Cerberus's tail. "A master in his profession. During the brouhaha tonight," went on Poirot, "Mr. Higgs induced Cerberus to follow him up out of Hell."

"*You* induced him?" The Countess stared incredulously at the small ratlike figure. "But *how? How?*

Mr. Higgs dropped his eyes bashfully.

"'Ardly like to say afore a lady But there's things no dogs won't resist. Follow me anywhere a dog will if I want 'im to."

The Countess Rossakoff turned on Poirot.

"But why? *Why?*"

Poirot said slowly, "A dog trained for the purpose will carry an article in his mouth until he is commanded to loose it. He will carry it if need be for hours. Will you now tell your dog to drop what he holds?"

Vera Rossakoff stared, turned and uttered two crisp words.

The great jaws of Cerberus opened. Poirot stepped forward. He picked up a small package encased in pink spongebag rubber. He unwrapped it. Inside it was a packet of white powder.

"What is it?" the Countess demanded sharply.

Poirot said softly, "Cocaine. Such a small quantity, it would seem—but enough to be worth thousands of pounds to those willing to pay for it. Enough to bring ruin and misery to several hundred people."

She caught her breath. "And you think that *I*—but it is not so! I swear to you it is not so! In the past I have amused myself with the jewels, the *bibelots,* the little curiosities—it all helps one to live, you understand. And what I feel is why not? Why should one person own a thing more than another?"

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"Just what I feel about dogs," Mr. Higgs chimed in.

"You have no sense of right or wrong," said Poirot sadly to the Countess.

She went on, "But drugs—that, no! For there one causes misery, pain, degeneration! I had no idea —no faintest idea—that my so charming, so innocent, so delightful little Hell was being used for *that* purpose!"

"I agrees with you about dope," said Mr. Higgs. "Doping of greyhounds—that's dirty, that is! I wouldn't never have nothing to do with anything like that."

"But say you believe me, my friend," implored the Countess.

"But of course I believe you! Have I not taken time and trouble to convict the real organizer of the dope racket. Have I not performed the twelfth Labor of Hercules and brought Cerberus up from Hell to prove my case? For I tell you this, I do not like to see my friends framed—yes, *framed*—for it was *you* who were intended to take the rap if things went wrong! It was in *your* handbag the emeralds would have been found and if anyone had been clever enough to suspect a hiding place in the mouth of a savage dog—*eh bien*, he is *your* dog, is he not? Even if he *has* accepted *la petite Alice* to the point of obeying her orders also!

"Yes, you may well open your eyes! From the first I did not like that young lady with her scientific jargon and her coat and skirt with the big pockets. Yes, *pockets*. Unnatural that any woman should be so disdainful of her appearance! And what does she say to me—that it is fundamentals that count! Aha, what is fundamental is *pockets*. Pockets, in which she can carry drugs and take away jewels—a little exchange easily made while she is dancing with her accomplice whom she pretends to regard as a psychological case.

"Aha, but what a cover! No one suspects the earnest, the scientific psychologist with a medical degree and spectacles. She can smuggle in drugs, and induce her rich patients to form the habit, and put up the money for a night club and arrange that it shall be run by someone with —shall we say, a little weakness in her past! But she despises Hercule Poirot, she thinks she can deceive him with her talk of nursery governesses and vests!

"*Eh bien*, I am ready for her. The lights go off. Quickly I rise from my table and go to stand by Cerberus. In the darkness I hear her come. She opens his mouth and forces in the package, and I—delicately, unfelt by her, I snip with a tiny pair of scissors a little piece of her sleeve."

Dramatically he produced a sliver of material.

"You observe—the identical checked tweed—and I will give it to Japp to fit it back where it belongs—and make the arrest—and

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say how clever once more has been Scotland Yard."

The Countess Rossakoff stared at him. Suddenly she let out a wail like a foghorn.

"But my Niki—my Niki. This will be terrible for him—" She paused. "Or do you think not?"

"There are a lot of other girls in America," said Hercule Poirot.

"And but for you his mother would be in prison—in *prison*—with her hair cut off—sitting in a cell—and smelling of disinfectant! Ah, but you are wonderful—*wonderful.*"

Surging forward, she clasped Poirot in her arms.

A week later Miss Lemon brought a bill for the flowers to her employer.

"Excuse me, Monsieur Poirot. Is it in order for me to pay this? 'Leonora, Florist. Red roses. Eleven pounds, eight shillings. Sent to Countess Vera Rossakoff, Hell."

As the hue of red roses, so were the cheeks of Hercule Poirot.

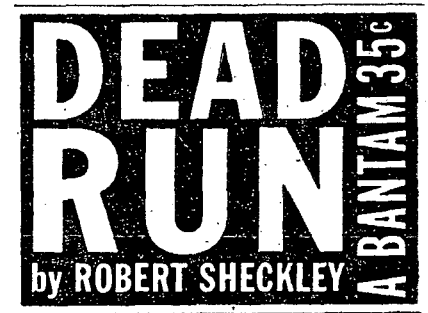
"Perfectly in order, Miss Lemon. A little—er—tribute to an occasion. The Countess's son has just become engaged in America—to the daughter of his employer, a steel magnate. Red roses are—I seem to remember—her favorite flower."

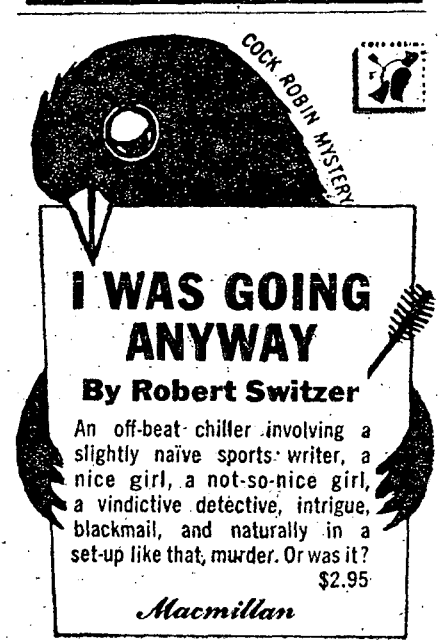
"Quite," said Miss Lemon. "They're very expensive this time of year."

Hercule Poirot drew himself up. "There are moments," he said, "when one does not economize."

Humming a little tune, he went out of the door. His step was light, almost sprightly. Miss Lemon stared after him. Her filing system was forgotten. All her feminine instincts were aroused.

"Good gracious," she murmured. "I wonder . . . Really—at *his* age!"

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As it appeared in "The New York Times Book Review," February 26, 1961 . . .

THERE WAS NO MYSTERY IN WHAT THE CRIME EDITOR WAS AFTER

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

Twenty years ago the American detective short story meant nothing to the general reader and little even to the specialist in crime fiction. The best books of shorts came from England; anthologies, even those edited by Americans, were dominated by British stories; and the American magazines concentrating on crime seemed carefully packaged to repel the cultivated reader. (Worse, from a writer's viewpoint, they paid badly.)

Today American short stories of crime and detection not only lead in the international suspense market but often demand attention as literature. No less than four series of annual anthologies, predominantly of American stories, sustain a gratifyingly high standard. (And a writer can get a decent price for a story.) This happy change has been effected almost solely through the existence of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, which this month celebrates its 20th anniversary.

To appreciate just what Queen has done as an editor (you and I know that Queen is two men named Frederic Dannay and Manfred B. Lee, but it's going to keep things simpler if I refer to him as a single entity—which, in a metaphysical way, he is), take a look at the history of the detective short story. This originated, with Edgar Allan Poe, as an American form; but the English took the play away from us with such masters as Conan Doyle and G. K. Chesterton. Although a few Americans (notably Melville Davisson Post in the Curtis magazines) produced fine stories, the genre did not really return to this country until the 1920s, and then in a markedly delimited form in the pulps.

The first all-crime fiction magazine here was Street & Smith's Detective Story (1915); but what we think of as characteristic pulp detection came a little later, with Black Mask (1920) and Flynn's (1924), later rechristened Detective Fiction Weekly (1929). These are the great names, which still ring with delight to those who knew them when. Here, the tough, realistic detective story came into being. By far the greater, and much of the best part of Dashiell Hammett's work appeared in the pulps before he was ever heard of by the literati who re-

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cently mourned him. The same is true of Raymond Chandler and Cornell Woolrich. There were countless other pulp writers who went on to hardcover success in mystery novels (Erle Stanley Gardner) or mainstream fiction (T. S. Stribling, MacKinlay Kantor).

The great virtue of the pulps was at the same time their defect. They introduced a fresh vigor of action and prose which had its impact on all of American literature (it can be argued that much of what is called "the Hemingway influence" is actually the influence of Hammett and his colleagues); and characterization, at least in the best pulp writers, was more honest and often more subtle than in the contemporary slicks.

The pulps, however, restricted themselves to this one category of story: the hard-punching tale of action and (to an extent that seems mild enough today) violence. The detective book, meanwhile, embraced a dozen other types: the romance, the comedy, the strict deductive problem, the serious analysis of the wellsprings of motive, and so forth. With the exception of Tower's Mystery Magazine, an attempt at a crime slick, which published some interesting stories but lasted only from 1929 to 1936, there was in the Nineteen Twenties and Thirties no magazine market for short stories aimed at the average reader of mystery novels.

This state of affairs exasperated the young Ellery Queen. In 1933 he was only 28 and already one of America's leading mystery writers—in book form; magazines were all but closed to him. So he founded a magazine called Mystery League, the first issue of which included a complete novel by his pseudonym Barnaby Ross. The magazine collapsed after four months, for business and financial reasons having nothing to do with its quality, which was high.

Queen went on gathering detective short stories, amassing the world's greatest library of short crime fiction (now in the Library of the University of Texas), and culling from this trove the definitive detective anthology, "101 Years' Entertainment." Then at last he met an intelligent, imaginative and solvent magazine publisher—Lawrence E. Spivak, who has since abandoned publishing for his position as panelist on Meet the Press—and sold him the idea of a literate, tasteful and varied mystery magazine.

The first issue of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine appeared in the fall of 1941. (Why the official anniversary is celebrated in February is a minor mystery in itself.) It was in digest size, familiar now, but then freakish for a fiction magazine, well printed on good book paper, with a well-designed and restrained cover. It was a package that no one needed to hide. (The jackets of the pulps, like those of some of today's paperbacks, were usually far more lurid than their contents.)

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The stories were all reprints (new stories started with Vincent Starrett and Viola Brothers Shore, in the fourth issue, May, 1942), by the excellent lineup of Hammett, Allingham, Stribling, Abbot, Woolrich, Brennan and Queen. They were highly varied in type (imagine Hammett and Allingham together in any earlier magazine!) but similar in excellence, representing the occasional short-story-for-the-reader-of-mystery-novels which had slipped by editors in the past and implying that here was a new and hungry future market for such stories.

As the Nineteen Forties advanced into the post-war period, the pulps began to dwindle, and by 1950 we heard no more of Thrilling Mystery or Spicy Detective or Ten Detective Aces or The Shadow. Even the giants, Black Mask and Flynn's (which resumed its birth-name in its death throes), finally folded, but E.Q.M.M. continued to grow and to improve in both quality and circulation.

About half of today's mystery magazines are unredeemable trash. The technical professional standards of the poorest pulps of the Thirties were immeasurably higher. (I have suggested before that the true heirs of the action-pulps today are the original paperback novels.) The adjective "unpublishable" seems to have lost all meaning.

And the more competent magazines tend, like the old pulps, to specialize too narrowly—Manhunt, for instance, in the harsh and shocking; Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine in neat little ironies which would make half-hour TV scripts for Alfred Hitchcock Presents. The one exception would seem to be the very new Ed McBain's Mystery Book, contrastingly varied but of uniform high quality in its first two appearances.

Queen, one would gather, has had a marked influence on American mystery writers: almost every book of crime short stories in the past twenty years has been in whole or in large part from E.Q.M.M., and such collections as the Mystery Writers of America's annual anthology are normally dominated by E.Q.M.M. stories. But he has yet to exert much influence on his fellow editors, who either fail to notice how he attains his success (his subscription list is some thirteen times as large as that of his nearest rival) or are just plain unable to emulate him.

This success of Queen's has not been solely with the reader of book-form mysteries. The quality of the fiction that he prints is such as to attract many admirers of the short story otherwise uninterested in crime. E.Q.M.M. stories appear regularly on Martha Foley's Roll of Honor and sometimes even in the contents of her annual "Best American Short Stories." E.Q.M.M. has published every important crime writer who ever wrote a short story. (Well, there is one exception: Raymond Chandler; but a Chandler story is now in inventory awaiting

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publication.) It has also published an unbelievable number of Big Names from mainstream fiction not usually associated with crime, including 27 Pulitzer and 8 Nobel prize-winners.

Some of these are frequent E.Q.M.M. contributors—Mark Van Doren, for example, whose subtle and distinguished fiction usually appears either in some rarefied literary quarterly or in E.Q.M.M. Others, such as Sinclair Lewis, Arthur Miller or George Bernard Shaw, are fruits of Queen's indefatigable research.

For if Queen has a weakness, it is his crusading desire to prove that every significant writer who ever existed has written at least one story that can be subsumed into the crime-mystery category. An astonishing number, to be sure, really have; but Queen's Procrustean efforts to fit all writers to his deathbed threaten at times to turn E.Q.M.M. into a magazine of general fiction—and, on second thought, is this necessarily a bad thing?

Parallel to Queen's passion for Names is his eagerness to discover and introduce unknown writers. I doubt if any other magazine, in any genre, has printed so many "first stories" in a similar span of time. E.Q.M.M. discoveries who have gone on to marked success, both in E.Q.M.M. and elsewhere, include Lillian de la Torre, Donald McNutt Douglass, Jack Finney, Henry Slesar, Joseph Whitehill, Vinnie Williams, James Yaffe, and America's most distinguished contemporary writer of short crime fiction, Stanley Ellin.

What makes Queen such an unrivaled editor of crime fiction? Well, for one thing, he actually edits, himself, in person (or persons)—something that is far from common in magazines with illustrious names as part of the title. He prints excellent old stories because he has (or had) an incomparable collection of books and magazines and a truffle-hound's nose for finding the one revivable story in an otherwise tedious volume. He prints excellent new stories partly because the very quality of the magazine (and the annual anthologies derived from it) attracts and stimulates good writers, partly because he is a sensitive and creative editor who is not content to decide whether or not a story is purchasable as it stands, but will work almost collaboratively with an author—I speak from experience—until a story realizes its full potential.

Most of all, I think, it's because Queen's primary aim is to please and satisfy himself, and not a market survey. Over thirty years ago, he knew what kind of magazine he wanted to read, and write for. No such magazine existed, and he was forced to invent one. E.Q.M.M. is still edited not only by but for E.Q.; and fortunately hundreds of thousands of readers, never discovered by the shrewd manipulators of The Magazine Game, approve.

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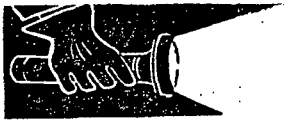

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

The novel of international intrigue and espionage flourishes these days almost as verdantly as it did during World War II; but new variations on this firmly established form are still possible. For good straight intrigue-adventure, see the consistently satisfactory series by Edward S. Aarons or Donald Hamilton; for more off-beat approaches to the topic, see the first three novels below.

★★★★ **NIGHT OF WENCESLAS, *by Lionel Davidson*** (Harper, $3.50)
The season's most unheroic hero is trapped into serving as courier and ends up fleeing the Czech Security Police throughout Prague in a wonderfully vivid chase. Fresh, intelligent debut from England.

★★★ **THE TIRED SPY, *by David Stone*** (Putnam's, $3.95)
This would be just another novel (if a good one) about a man who escapes his dull job to become a painter; but the job is espionage, and the flight has international repercussions. Nice idea, deftly done.

★★★ **THE CHINESE HAMMER, *by Simon Harvester*** (Walker, $3.50)
With terse objectivity, Harvester conveys the plodding drudgery, interrupted by spurts of violent action, that makes up the life of the professional agent. Setting: Tibet.

★★★ **HUNTER AT LARGE, *by Thomas B. Dewey*** (Simon & Schuster, $3.50)
Cop's transcontinental quest for his wife's killers makes tense, tough novel of pursuit and retribution.

★★★ **FOOTSTEPS IN THE NIGHT, *by Dolores Hitchens*** (Crime Club, $2.95)
Shocking murder of junior-high girl exposes secrets in California suburb. Well-constructed puzzle of people and motives.

Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot stars in 5 of his best cases (35¢ each): 13 AT DINNER (1933; Dell D404), MURDER IN THREE ACTS (1934; Popular G523), MURDER IN MESOPOTAMIA (1936; Dell D405), THERE IS A TIDE (1948; Dell D403) and CAT AMONG THE PIGEONS (1960; Pocket Books 6052). Reversing the usual reprint process, SQUAD ROOM (Simon & Schuster, $3.50) completes the hard-cover reissue of Ed McBain's excellent paperbacks.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **CARL HENRY RATHJEN**

TITLE: ***Full Moon Tonight***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: *Fire Marshal Manning*

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Stories of arson are not common. Here is an interesting procedural account of one of Fire Marshal's Manning's headaches—with not only a pyromaniac but a Parole Board.*

FIRE MARSHAL ED MANNING SPOTted the State Penitentiary envelope in the morning mail. Slitting it open, he glanced at the clock. In half an hour he was due at Grammar School Six to speak on fire prevention. Funny how he, a bachelor, could always reach the kids. Maybe because they reached him too.

The envelope contained a bulletin, the usual notice to Police and Fire Departments, announcing the release of habitual felons, deviates, and pyromaniacs. The Fire Marshal scanned it until the name Fischer shot a chill up his spine to his red head.

"The Parole Board's done it again," he snapped to Chick Sims, his assistant investigator who kept his gray hair long in an effort to cover scar tissue. "This time it's Fischer. Only one-quarter of his sentence, right on the nose."

"Our noses," Sims said dourly. "Well, here we go again."

Manning shot his gaze to the calendar, seeking the next phase of full moon. That was when Ray Fischer, a compulsive pyromaniac, always made his touch-offs. Manning too vividly remembered the last time. He'd been prowling a tenement neighborhood, seeking Fischer's trail after losing him while trampling out a blaze he'd caught the pyro setting. Searching,

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he'd been only a half block from sudden shouts and screams fringing a second fire. Radioing an alarm, he assisted the escape of hysterical women, shrilling children, panicky men until the stairway became a roaring chimney. The rest waited for ladders, or morgue canvases, and he could still hear the sound of the woman who jumped from the fifth floor and hit the pavement beside him.

Fischer should have got life, but in court Manning didn't have enough conclusive evidence—not even a flicker of admission—for the big touch-off. So Fischer got five years for the minor blaze and now, after serving fifteen months, he was out again.

Manning turned from the calendar. His thoughts grappled, angry, scared. Sims scowled, stretching his game leg.

"They ought to let us carry guns," he said bitterly.

Manning gave him a look. Sims was hard to hold down sometimes, hating the only job the department could give him and taking it out on fire ordinance violators.

"You're going soft on me, looking for an easy way out," said Manning, cringing at the thought of explaining to crying mothers and widowed husbands why a firebug was on the loose. It couldn't happen again with Fischer. He picked up the phone. "Get me the parole office," he told the headquarters operator. A secretary finally answered. "Put Officer Redfield on," Manning demanded. "I don't care what he's doing. Get him on the line."

"Mr. Redfield is on leave of absence. I'm handling his cases. I'm Julia Worden. May I assist you? I didn't get your name."

"Manning," he said, frowning. "Marshal, Fire Department, Arson Bureau. Who's assigned to that pyromaniac, Ray Fischer, just released from the state pen?"

"I told you, Marshall. *I* am covering Mr. Redfield's cases."

"I thought women were confined to juveniles and females."

"As you know, Marshal," she said firmly, "we're always shorthanded. I've come down from the capital to fill in. Ray Fischer is *my* case. Just what is it you wanted to know? I can tell you he has a family and a job awaiting him. He has been rehabilitated."

"I've heard that before," Manning snapped, picturing her as a cold fish. A tailor-suited, prim-rodded spinster who did no good for the enforcement guys who had to take the hell of running them down again.

"You sound prejudiced, Marshal," she began.

"That's right," said Manning. "Me and a lot of people in the cemetery. Stay in your office. I'm coming over." Hanging up, he turned to Sims. "Does the name Worden ring a bell with you?"

"I'll find out," Sims growled.

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"Let me see her while you give the little monsters of Grammar School Six some words of wisdom. I won't have to watch my language talking to her."

"I'll handle both," said Manning. "You stay on deck for calls. Get an alert okayed by the Old Man for a mimeo to all station commanders. I want it to include a complete description of Fischer. Tell them to pass the word around their districts to all building superintendents and managers. Get to it. Full moon's coming in three days."

Too mad to take the stairs, he slid the brass to the garage adjoining the headquarters apparatus floor. In his coupe he wished it were the sort of emergency where he could use red light and siren. This was one of those times when he wondered if the state had been wise in abolishing capital punishment. He had to admit it hadn't been much of a deterrent, but neither were stiff sentences when the Parole Board went soft.

As he expected when he entered Julia Worden's office, she sat very erect, was tailor-suited, but she was about thirty years younger than he'd imagined. Her dark eyes, matching wavy hair, looked a little tired, but friendly despite a faint flush on the set cheeks. A prim-rodder with interesting curves—not a cover girl, but good enough for somewhere inside the book. Plenty good. His angry words vanished, but he cut off her greeting.

"How long are you going to be handling the Fischer case?"

Julia Worden seemed amused by his dismay. "Please be seated, Marshal Manning. I don't like people looking down at me."

He sat. "Suppose I brief you in on why I'm so brusque."

"Let me talk," she interrupted. "It may save time and temper if I tell you what I have already learned." Her slim hand touched a folder. "You first caught Ray Fischer for a residential garage fire when he was seven years old. All children, Marshal, go through the playing-with-matches stage."

"I know." Manning tried to be patient. "I hauled him and his parents before a juvenile judge who told them off too. It was a first offense—the first known one—and no charges were made since they paid the damages. But you're supposed to be telling me, so go on."

She did, coolly mentioning unproved neighborhood grass fires, but detailing the high school janitor's closet which could have been spontaneous combustion. Anyway, it happened outside of school hours and Ray Fischer was in the building, claiming he had come back for some sports gear. Again no prosecution, but a judge ordered psychiatric analysis and then placed him on probation for six months.

Next came a gap in the record which Manning had never been able to fill officially—a series of apartment, hotel, and department

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store fires, all obviously arson jobs. At the times, he had interrogated all known suspects, particularly Fischer who, of course, claimed innocence. Finally Manning had got a conviction, less than two years ago, for the first of the two tenement fires. Now Fischer was out again despite numerous previous questionings about arson jobs in neighboring cities, though no convictions.

Julia Worden met Manning's eye. "Did I overlook anything?"

"That's what I'm hoping you won't do," he said. "I know your office is overworked, but this guy's got to be watched."

"If I don't do it, you'll hound him. Is that it, Marshal?"

Manning started to stand up, but recalled she didn't like that. "I'll give any guy a break if he deserves it. And I'd like to see one handed to my department and police friends sometime. We're going round and round in a squirrel cage, grabbing pyros, perverts, known felons, and then having the Parole Board turn them loose. Fischer is only one of too many."

"On the face of the record perhaps," Julia Worden began.

Manning stood over her. "On the charred faces of victims. It's bad enough that Fischer is a compulsive pyro—the psychiatric report confirms that—but he's shifted his touch-offs to crowded areas for added thrill. He's a menace."

"He's a human being, Marshal, and I don't think he's been given a chance to be one."

Staring down at her, Manning ignored a revision of his original estimate. Give her some rest to remove that weariness about the eyes and she *was* a cover girl.

"He's a menace to other human beings who are trying to live normal, adjusted lives. I don't know what your background is, Miss Worden, but if you take my advice you'll have this case transferred to a man." He could see by her smile she regarded that as a victory. He couldn't cope with her. A man would be an easier pushover. Manning thumped his fist on the desk. "Believe me, I know what I'm talking about. Fischer is dangerous, untrustworthy. You can't handle him with a lot of do-good theories."

She studied him. "You know, Marshal, I think you're right." She smiled. "Maybe you have got it in you to give a person a break."

Manning hefted that in his mind, but couldn't decide whether it was genuine or bait. "Let me know who's taking the case until Redfield gets back."

"I already told you, Marshal. I'm taking it."

Manning went down to his car, swearing. At Grammar School Six, fine-combing his words, he felt he wasn't reaching the gay little faces that looked like a huge bed of flowers in the auditorium. But when he finished, the kids cheered him, and . . .

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"Pretty rugged, Marshal," remarked the baldheaded principal. "You scared me, but I guess we all need it."

"Oh, Marshal," gushed a Mrs. Ackerman, willowy P.T.A. president, "you were so forceful and dynamic. I'm going to speak to our program chairman. The women's auxiliary must hear you."

Escaping, Manning headed determinedly for headquarters, but detoured to answer a battalion chief's request for an investigator at a loft fire. Thinking of Fischer, the Parole Board, and Julia Worden, he barely checked himself from acting like Sims. He cited the loft tenant for misdemeanor, not criminal negligence. When he got to the office, Sims took his bum leg off the desk.

"Don't tell me, Ed. I can see it. And I also found out why you didn't get cooperation from the Worden dame. Her old man's an ex-judge who once sentenced a guy to be hanged, then found out he was wrong, too late. He led the fight against capital punishment. Now he's on the Parole Board."

"So that's where I heard the name before," Manning muttered. "I guess, in his spot, I would have joined the abolitionists too."

"For doing what you thought was your job?" Sims demanded. "But wait, you haven't heard anything yet. At the time of the execution, Julia Worden was just plain housewife. Too bad she still isn't."

"What about her?" Manning asked irritably. He hadn't noticed a ring on her finger.

"Her husband," said Sims, "was a highway patrolman, the arresting officer in the case. Six months after the mistaken necktie party his car went off the road one night. It's still a question of whether it was accident or suicide."

Manning blew through his teeth. "She's had it rough. You'd never know, though." He stared at the calendar. "We'd better take over Chick. Put a twenty-four-hour surveillance on Fischer."

The round-the-clock watch was a nightmare. Fischer had a job with a floor-covering outfit which specialized in public buildings—hotels, restaurants, theaters—places where a pyro could jeopardize scores of lives. Manning's men crowded right after him.

Manning, taking over from an Inspector whose wife was going to have a baby, prowled the service hall and kitchen adjoining a hotel banquet room. It was the day after full moon, still too close for comfort. Sniffing, he poked around rolls of linoleum and other paraphernalia, opened closets and cabinets. Suddenly, a voice spoke very quietly behind him.

"If you find anything, Marshal, it won't be my doing."

Turning, Manning glimpsed intent brown eyes, blond crewcut, moonface tanned from working on

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the prison honor farm—part of the good behavior that had earned the parole. Then he stiffened inwardly when he became aware that Fischer, standing close, held a trimming knife, sharp and hooked, at stomach level.

"I hope you're right," said Manning, watching the knife indirectly. "Nothing pleases me more than not to find anything."

Fischer's cheeks bunched. "Thank you, Marshal." He slipped the knife into a leather holder. "No hard feelings."

"That depends on you," Manning said evenly.

"I'm a changed man, Marshal. Didn't Miss Worden tell you?"

Manning nodded, thinking that he'd also been told once that marriage would make a difference in Fischer. He'd almost believed it—until those two tenement fires.

"How's the wife?' he inquired, offering a cigarette.

Fischer's gaze hardened. "I gave them up," he said curtly. Then, relaxing, he went on. "She's having to get used to being in nights by nine thirty. Miss Worden's orders for me. My wife's bothered more, though, by your men following us everywhere, hanging around outside all night."

When Fischer didn't dig for a match, Manning struck one for his cigarette and watched those eyes fasten on the flame.

"She'll have to put up with it a while," he said.

"Sure, Marshall. I know how it is. But those sudden things aren't going to come over me any more." Fischer lowered his voice. "Don't louse up my job for me, will you? The customers and my boss don't like all this checking up."

"We don't like it either," said Manning.

"Then lay off," pleaded Fischer.

"It's a promise," Manning declared, "whenever we're convinced you're laying off for keeps."

Fischer hooked his thumb above the leather holder. "You can count on it, Marshal."

The moon went into its last quarter, then down to a sliver, and early one afternoon the Old Man sent for Manning.

"I've received a complaint from Fischer's employer. He doesn't want to have to fire Fischer. Says he's a good worker."

"They usually are," Manning agreed. "That's the hell of it. Makes them look like good old rehabilitated Joe Citizens—until the next compulsion comes along. Then we get the hell of it."

"I'm not censuring you, Ed," the Old Man said placatingly. "I'm just reconfirming my stand behind you."

"Thanks, Chief." Manning went back to his office. Sims raised his eyebrows. "Carry on as usual," Manning said, "but be a little less obvious watching Fischer."

Sims growled. "With two crowd-

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ed conventions over where he's working now? It's enough to start gray hairs pushing through my bald spot. If I had my way—"

The phone gave the long ring which meant an alarm summons for the Arson Bureau. Manning grabbed it and, listening to the dispatcher, felt a chill and thought of gay little faces.

"Grammar School Six," he repeated, as he snatched his white cap from the desk and hit the brass pole in the corridor.

Three screaming blocks from headquarters the dispatcher called again, via radio, "Cancel School Six. No blaze. Kids horseplaying in the cafeteria broke a sprinkler and flooded the place."

"Ten-four, Car Seven," Manning acknowledged, relieved, but sweating and wondering if kids would start knocking off sprinklers now that they knew reduced water pressure automatically rang in an alarm. He swung back to the office. Sims had gone home to sleep before taking the evening vigil on Fischer. He'd left a note.

"*She* called. Wouldn't listen to me. Try your charm."

Manning phoned Julia Worden.

"Well, Marshal," she said, "full moon has come and gone."

"It's the new one, the dark of the moon," he replied. "Now it starts building up to the full again."

"In other words," she charged, "as your crude assistant said—"

"My apologies there," Manning interrupted. "Avoid conversations with him, Miss Worden. He's had it rough and hasn't learned to take it as gracefully as . . . as some people."

When she spoke again, her voice was subdued. "You're very understanding, Marshal."

"Sometimes it doesn't appear that way," he answered. "I want to give Fischer a break, Miss Worden, but I don't dare. I've been burned too many times—rather, too many innocent people have."

"You're still going to hound him then," she accused sharply.

"We're still going to watch him," Manning corrected. "How do you think I'd feel if we backed off and something serious happened?"

"How does it feel not to let him live a normal life?"

"I don't have any choice," said Manning. "I'm sorry."

"So am I, Marshal."

She hung up. Manning reluctantly released the phone on the cradle and glowered at the calendar.

That evening in his bachelor apartment he was catching up on reports for the Old Man when the phone jangled at nine thirty-five.

"Marshal," said the dispatcher. "You're wanted at six-four-seven West Eighth." Manning squinted. That was Ray Fischer's home. "They said to tell you, Marshal, that they got him."

Manning had his official car at home since his bureau was short-

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handed by the stakeout and sick leaves. As he wailed across town he felt no vindicating elation. This was going to be a blow to Julia Worden. Did she have enough courage left after the other bumps she'd been over?

Swinging into Eighth he saw red flashers on turret tops, a black and white police sedan, and two red coupes. Sims came to Manning's car with glowing eyes.

"I told you it would happen. The damn fool. With us right on his tail from a drive-in movie, he sets one in the alley."

"Did you see him do it?" Manning demanded, getting out.

"He was standing right over it when I nabbed him. Stinnard called in an alarm, then blacked it down with a garden hose before the rigs got rolling. We got him cuffed in the prowl car."

Manning started toward the police sedan, but a long-legged girl came running down the steps of the Fischer home to intercept him. Rivulets glistened on her cheeks.

"He didn't do it," she screamed. "I'm his wife. I was with him every second. He didn't do it!"

This was the part Manning always hated. He waited until she ran out of breath. "Mrs. Fischer, you and his parents wouldn't let yourselves believe it the other times either."

"But I *know*," she cried.

She'd known his record too when they eloped, but her folks just raised their hands and said what could you do with young people these days? And, Manning wondered, what could you do with some adults these days?

He opened the sedan's door. Fischer leaned against the cushions, his hands cuffed behind him.

"Well, Ray?" said Manning.

Fischer shrugged. There was no animosity in his eyes as he replied, "You never believe me anyway." He stared away, but his young wife, screaming, pulled at Manning. "Why don't you leave us alone?"

"Elaine!" Julia Worden said sharply behind Manning. He turned. She wore a gray suit that wasn't at all masculine.

Fischer's wife sobbed. "I—I tried to call you. There was no answer."

Manning stared at Julia Worden. How did she know then? What was she doing here? There was no friendliness in her gaze.

"I want to speak to you, Marshal, privately."

Sims jeered. "Why don't you be a good sport, Miss Worden?"

Her eyes flashed at him, then back to Manning.

"Will my car do?" he asked.

She nodded.

It wasn't just night chill that Manning felt, following her. She turned suddenly on the curb, making him pause in the gutter. A bystander edged near in the darkness.

"Beat it!" Manning snapped, then faced Julia Worden.

"I keep vigils too, Marshal," she

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said. "I kept one tonight to see that my case got in by nine thirty. I saw him start to obey my rule, then move toward the fire—which your man set!"

Manning started. "Sims?" he exclaimed in a shallow whisper.

"I'd like to believe, Marshal, that you didn't order it. That is why I waited until you arrived. But that's personal. What is more important—what are you going to do about it?"

Manning stared, stunned beyond belief. Julia Worden didn't wait. She spread it all out for him to choose.

"It's my word, one woman, one person—his wife wouldn't be believed anyway—against two of your men, Marshal, against your own obsession about Ray Fischer."

Manning felt the impact of her anger. His face burned, yet coldness clamped his chest, freezing any possible words. Turning, getting a flashlight from his car, he beckoned Sims to follow between houses to the rear alley. His sweeping light revealed sodden, blackened rubbish near a garage, close enough to have touched the garage off once the blaze got going, but the structure was scarcely scorched. He raised the light full into Sims's face.

"Did you frame him?"

"Ed," Sims began, "we all got separated when he left the drive-in during the pizza break. Stinnard took one route looking for him, and got here just as I was nabbing Fischer."

"I didn't ask you that."

Sims tried to see through the glaring light. "What's got into you, Ed? The dame knocking you off-center?"

"I'm dead-centered on that question, Chick. Answer it."

Manning lowered the light. Sims swore bitterly.

"All right, Ed. But use your head. Fischer was going to do it sooner or later. So why shouldn't we get him when there are no lives in danger?"

"For the same reason," Manning snapped, "the department didn't give you the boot before you got out of line." He strode out to the police sedan. "Release the prisoner."

He couldn't look at Julia Worden. She went in the house with the Fischers. When she came out she didn't glance toward Manning's car.

In the morning, to protect the department, he had to tell the Old Man.

"Too bad," the Old Man said gravely. "I'll have to suspend him. On past performance he's earned a pension. I don't want to jeopardize it, charging him before a trial board, unless the Fischers sue or the parole office complains. What do you think Julia Worden will do?"

Manning sighed. "I wouldn't risk asking. She might try to rig a deal for Fischer. And that wouldn't be good either."

A curved edge of moon cut

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through the dark sky again, grew into the first quarter, then bulged toward the full. Manning, really short-handed now with Sims on suspension, put in extra tricks, personally dogging Fischer's movements as unobtrusively as possible.

He didn't encounter Julia Worden, nor did anything come from her office regarding Sims. The uncertainty—about Fischer, about Sims, about Julia—made Manning irritable. When Mrs. Ackerman, the P.T.A. president, phones a request for him to speak to the women's auxiliary on the eve of full moon, he curtly refused.

And then Fischer, that very afternoon, led him to Grammar School Six after lunch hour. The cafeteria tile linoleum was a tripping menace for little feet—it had buckled where the flood from the sprinkler had worked down in the seams. Mrs. Ackerman spotted Manning first. Her smile scarcely came through the make-up.

"How nice you managed to come after being so positive you couldn't, Marshal. But we've arranged for an oldtime movie. I do hope you're not planning a fire drill in the midst of it."

Manning bowed slightly. His embarrassment became worse when he saw Julia Worden approaching in the corridor. Mrs. Ackerman moved on, head high. Julia Worden glanced into the cafeteria, side to side, then came on, frowning.

"At least *you're* not breathing over his shoulder," she remarked coolly. "So I suppose I've got no cause to complain."

"You had plenty of cause," said Manning, thinking of Sims. "Why didn't you?"

The sudden tinge of color was beautiful on her. "You gave my man a break, Marshall. It took courage to make that decision. It made me—well, re-evaluate some of my attitudes." She hesitated, then went on quickly. "I haven't come to any decisions as yet."

"It's pretty tough sometimes," Manning agreed, and then Mrs. Ackerman came back into the corridor.

"Marshal," she called, very upset. "Did that linoleum man come by here with reels of film? He must have picked them up by mistake when he removed his materials from our meeting room."

Manning started to shake his head, then jumped to the cafeteria doors. Ray Fischer was nowhere in sight!

'He wasn't there," Julia Worden exclaimed, "when I glanced in. I just thought—"

Manning raced past tables with chairs upturned on them and thrust through swinging doors into the kitchen. At the far end two women, hanging up gleaming copper pots, turned curiously.

Manning barked. "Where'd he go? The linoleum man!"

One woman pointed. "Out there with some round cans."

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Manning lunged out to a deserted courtyard, then spotted another door with a warning sign, *STAY OUT*. Oh, no, he prayed, not in there, the school's service plant, furnace, incinerator, air conditioning. Mrs. Ackerman had said the film was an oldtimer. That meant it was highly flammable. If its acrid, suffocating smoke got into the school's ventilation ducts there would be a lot of choking, asphyxiating kids and teachers.

"Find an alarm box," Manning snapped to Julia Worden behind him. "Pull it. Get them out."

But she was already inside the door with him. Clattering metal jerked his gaze to the right. It was the cover of a film can flopping on the floor as Ray Fischer spun around, his feet in a tangle of film beside the papers of an overturned rubbish container. And worse, the pyro was beside the air conditioner with an inspection door wide open. The fumes would be drawn in, distributed throughout the school, into every classroom.

"Don't move, Fischer!" Manning commanded.

Fischer flung himself behind the unit, trailing film. Manning charged around the other side. He didn't intercept Fischer. Barging on around, he stopped short. The canny pyro had doubled back to seize Julia Worden just as she reached for an alarm box. Holding her, he poised the hooked knife by her white throat.

"Now you stand still, Marshall," he warned.

Manning obeyed, trying to watch him, not Julia Worden's terror. Fischer's eyes gleamed. His free hand fumbled in a pocket and brought out wooden matches.

"Don't be a fool, Fischer," Manning called. "The fumes will floor us. You'll never get out."

"I'll get out. But you won't."

Manning measured the distance. Too far. And a mass of film lay between him and Julia Worden's captor, between him and the door. He eyed a length of pipe leaning against the wall. Would he have a chance to grab and hurl it to distract Fischer? He crouched. Julia Worden gasped as the knife touched her throat.

"I warned you," Fischer snapped.

"All right," Manning replied, trying not to sound tense. "But give her a chance, Fischer. She's tried to be your friend. Pull her closer to the door." He was also thinking of all the kids and their teachers, unaware of what was going to stream into each classroom.

Fischer hauled Julia Worden to the brick wall, extended his hand and scraped a bunch of matches. Manning didn't wait to see if the pyro's eyes would divert to the flaring flame. Gambling on it, he scooped up the length of pipe and lunged, shouting.

"Grab the knife, Julia!"

He had to chance that she would and could. But more important

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were the lives of all those kids. Swinging the pipe up, he desperately batted a projecting overhead sprinkler. There was time for only one blow. It *had* to be enough to shatter the brass loops holding the locking unit so that an alarm would ring in automatically.

The pipe slipped from his stinging fingers as Julia Worden struggled to hold the knife away. Fischer flung the flaming matches. Manning charged through them, feeling heat, smelling sulphur.

And then he had his hands on Fischer's wrist, twisting that knife away from Julia Worden. Behind him he heard film sputtering into flame. Cold water showered his face as he wrestled with Fischer. The school firebells clamored. It would ring in the alarm bureau too. Rigs would be rolling out, but they'd never respond in time to help him with this desperate maniac, strong from working on the prison honor farm—too strong for a guy who sat at a desk and rode around in a department coupe.

Manning suddenly stopped resisting. He relaxed, then suddenly ducked, flipping the off-balance pyro sprawling. Pouncing, he caught Fischer's head between a smashing fist and the concrete floor. Again, and again until Fischer went limp. Manning looked around, coughing in the smoke, then scrambled to a fire extinguisher to complete the job the damaged sprinkler was trying to do.

It was a tougher fight, afterward, to rid himself of the teachers, the P.T.A. mothers, the kids, the press, the officials downtown. He lost sight of Julia Worden, but she was waiting when he went off-duty at four.

"Fischer's parole is revoked," she said quietly as they strolled out to her car. "And I've also wired Redfield to come back and take over."

"Why do that?" Manning asked, dismayed.

"I'm not quitting, Marshal. I want to get back up north—I have some things I want to discuss with my father and the other members of the Parole Board. I don't know how much good it will do."

"We can always hope," said Manning. The light in her eyes, meeting his, blanked out the little lines of weariness. "You won't be leaving tonight," he suggested. She shook her head. "Then how about dinner?" he asked.

"If it's out of the city, and away from . . . "

"Sure," he said. "I'll pick you up about seven."

As she drove off he looked at the sky and smiled. Full moon tonight too.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **FLETCHER FLORA**

TITLE: ***The Spent Days***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *A story of great sensitivity—indeed, one of the most touching and delicately written stories we have read in a long time . . .*

CORA ROGAN CAME UPON THE GIRL at a curve in the walk where a white birch cast a pattern of light shade. She was sitting cross-legged on the grass under the birch, just at the edge of the walk, and shadows of leaves danced with the warm breeze in her hair and on her white dress.

She was playing jacks. She would lean forward and scatter the small metal pieces on the smooth concrete, and then she would toss a rubber ball into the air, letting it bounce once, and between the time it rose and fell and rose on the bounce, she would scoop up some of the jacks, whatever number was required at that particular stage of the game, and catch in the same hand the ball as it descended. She was wonderfully adept at it.

Cora stood and watched her do her twos and threes without a miss. If she was aware of Cora's presence, she gave no sign.

"Hello," Cora said, after a while

The girl looked up and smiled holding the jacks and rubber ball in her right hand. She had a small heart-shaped face with large gray eyes. Although she was very pretty it was not her prettiness that Cora was struck with, but the serenity in her eyes and smile that seemed to be of a piece with the way she held her hands and head and sat so quietly cross-legged on the grass

"Hello," she said.

"I was watching you play. Do you mind?"

"Not at all. Why should I?"

"I don't know. It might make you nervous and cause you to miss."

"I never get nervous, and I hardly ever miss. Only once in a while when I get to some of the more difficult things."

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"You're quite good, all right. I could see that."

"Would you care to play a game with me?"

"I don't know how."

"Oh, it's very simple. I'll show you as we go along."

"All right, but you mustn't expect me to be much competition."

Cora sat down beside the girl in position to use the concrete walk to play on. She could hear someone whistling a tune behind a spiraea bush farther along the walk, but no one was in sight.

"You must throw out the jacks," the girl said, "and pick them up while the ball bounces. Then you must catch the ball in the same hand with the jacks. First you do one at a time, and then two at a time, until finally you must pick them all up together. After that, there are some more difficult things to do."

"Perhaps you'd better explain the more difficult things when we come to them."

"Yes. I thought that would be better. What you must remember is that it's very important how you throw the jacks out. You must try to throw them so that it's easy to pick them up in ones or twos or threes or whatever number."

"I see."

"If you touch a jack you aren't supposed to pick up, or even make it move by pushing another jack against it, that means you miss and must give up your turn."

"All right. I think I understand it up to the more difficult things."

"Then you may have first turn."

She handed Cora the ball and jacks, and Cora threw out the jacks and began to play. She went through the ones all right, and through the twos, but she missed on the threes.

"That was very good for a beginning," the girl said.

"Do you think so? Thank you."

"If you had thrown out the threes a little more carefully, you could have gone right on."

"I threw them too hard, I think."

"Yes, they were too scattered for threes. The ball bounced twice before you could pick them up. Did you understand that it's a miss if the ball bounces twice?"

"Yes. I understood that."

"I believe I neglected to tell you."

"That's all right. I knew it."

"Then it's my turn."

She gathered up the jacks and threw them out and began to play and was soon through the game as far as she had explained it. Then she began to do the more difficult plays, explaining each one carefully and clearly before attempting it, so that Cora would know in advance exactly what was required of her.

Some of the plays demanded considerable dexterity, but she completed them all in order, after explanations, and then she laughed with pleasure in her skill, at the same time looking at Cora ruefully because of beating her so easily.

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"You're far too good for me," Cora said.

"Well, it's mostly a matter of practice. I shouldn't be surprised if you became quite good after you've played a while."

"I could never become as good as you."

"Would you like to play on through, just to learn? Misses won't count. I'll explain things again as you go along."

"Oh, no. That wouldn't be any fun for you."

"I don't mind. We could play another game after you've practiced."

"No, thank you. I know when I'm thoroughly beaten." Cora laughed and stood up, looking down at the shadows of leaves in pale hair. "I'm on my way up to the house to see your mother. Is she there?"

"Yes. She's on the back terrace, I think."

"Is your father there too?"

"My father's dead. He died before I was born."

"Oh. I'm sorry."

"My mother killed him. She shot him accidentally."

"What a terrible mistake!"

"She told me about it herself when I was old enough to understand. She thought it would be better than having me hear it from someone else."

"Your mother was wise to tell it to you in her own way."

"What do you want to see my mother about?"

"I thought she might like to contribute to a charity I'm interested in."

"Well, I don't know. Mother's very rich, of course, because of all the money Father left her, but she already has certain charities she supports."

"In any case, it will do no harm to ask her, will it?"

"No. You can go right around the house to the terrace if you like."

"I don't think I'd better do that. I'll ring at the front door and ask permission to see her first."

"Perhaps that would be better. Will you be back this way soon?"

"Probably. Pretty soon."

"If I'm still here, I'll say goodbye to you then."

"That would be nice."

"Thank you for playing jacks with me."

"You're quite welcome, I'm sure. The pleasure was mine."

Cora turned away and went on up the curving concrete walk past a small fountain showering water like shards of glittering glass into the sunlight. Beyond the fountain she ascended three wide steps and passed between tall columns onto the veranda of a Colonial-style house.

The house was white with dark green shutters at the windows, and it looked cool and gracious in the white, hot light of the afternoon. It was, in fact, much cooler on the veranda, out of the sun, and Cora waited for a few seconds with the

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most delicious sense of relief and pleasure before ringing the doorbell.

She was still thinking of the little girl under the white birch beside the walk, and it seemed to her a favorable omen that she had come across her on this particular day. *It takes Jacks or better to open,* she thought, feeling with the thought the delightful, tremulous sensation of inner laughter.

She rang the doorbell and waited, listening to the sounds of diminishing chimes, and soon the door was opened by a woman in the uniform of a maid. Conditioned air, escaping, flowed outward.

"Yes?" the maid said.

"I would like to see Mrs. Morrow," Cora said.

"Who shall I say is calling?"

"Cora Rogan."

"Will you state the nature of your visit, please?"

"It's personal. If Mrs. Morrow will be so kind as to see me, I'll take only a few minutes of her time."

"If you'll step in and wait a minute, I'll speak with Mrs. Morrow."

Cora stepped into a wide hall which divided ahead of her, ascending spirally on the right to the second floor and running on the left through the house to the rear.

The maid closed the front door and walked down the hall past the staircase, turning and disappearing into a room on the right side, and Cora remained standing in the cool, conditioned air. Her reflection waited with her, trapped in glass on a wall beside her, and she exchanged long looks with the reflection and smiled a little and was, on the whole, rather pleased.

She was thirty-eight now, no longer young, but she was slender as a girl in a beige linen suit, and her flesh was still firm, with only the slightest deepening of lines around the eyes and mouth, and she could still pass in soft light for what she really no longer was. Nowadays she grew tired more often than she had used to, of course, and once in a while she became a little frightened when she thought of the years that had gone so swiftly and the years that had still, somehow, to come and go.

Turning away from the reflection of herself, she lookd slowly around the hall, her eyes moving deliberately from one thing to another, and she thought as she looked that it was much the same as it used to be. There was a new runner on the stairs, and the telephone on the table against the wall was pale green instead of black, and the painting on the wall above the telephone was different from the one that had hung there before —but nothing of any significance had changed, not even the basic colors or the subtle sense of character that houses have.

She took a couple of steps toward the stairs, her thin heels tapping sharply on the gleaming hardwood

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floor, and at that moment the maid reappeared suddenly in the hall at the rear and came forward.

"If you will come this way, please," she said, "Mrs. Morrow will see you."

Cora followed her down the hall and off to the right into a large room with high, wide windows and a pair of glass doors opening onto a flagstone terrace. The maid stopped just inside the room and nodded toward the doors, through which Cora could see, sitting in a bright canvas chair beside a glass-topped table, a woman in a sheer flowered dress. On the table were an open book, lying face down, and a pitcher and matching glasses.

Cora crossed to the glass doors and let herself out onto the terrace, and the woman, Julia Morrow, stood up beside the table and greeted her with an expression in which there was the slightest suggestion of curiosity.

"Good afternoon, Miss Rogan," she said. "Will you sit down?"

"Thank you," Cora said. "It's kind of you to see me."

It was clear, she thought, that her name meant nothing to Julia Morrow, for there was no evidence of recognition in the tone of her voice, nor even the careful kind of control one might exercise to exclude such evidence.

Moving across the flagstones to the glass-topped table, Cora sat down in a bright chair, and Julia Morrow resumed the one from which she had just risen. The chairs were not placed directly opposite each other across the table, only a small arc of the circumference separating the two women. Their relative positions seemed to indicate a condition of intimacy, as if they had drawn together to exchange confidences.

"May I offer you some iced tea?" Julia Morrow said.

"No, thank you."

"Then what can I do for you?"

"To tell the truth, it's rather difficult to begin. I see that you don't recognize my name."

"You name? Cora Rogan? I'm sorry. Should I recognize it?"

"Perhaps not. I was our husband's first wife."

Now the expression of curiosity, wholly confined to Julia Morrow's eyes, gave way for an instant to a flare of surprise. It was gone, however, almost before it was discernible, and afterward there was no expression except courteous reserve.

"I see. I knew that my husband's first wife was named Cora, of course, but I had forgotten the rest of it. I understood that you had remarried."

"So I had, but it pleases me to use my maiden name. I lived with my second husband in Europe. He's dead now."

"I'm sorry."

"It was no great loss. We lived well, one way and another, but he left next to nothing. It's apparent that you have done much better."

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"I have all that I need. Have you come to see me simply because we shared, at different times, the same man?"

"It occurred to me that I didn't offer my sympathy at the time of his death. I thought I should come and do so."

"After all this time? It was eight years ago—nearly nine."

"So long as that? Time goes, doesn't it? Or is it we? Someone wrote a poem about that once. About its being we who go instead of time. Was it Ronsard?"

"I don't know. I read very little poetry."

"It must have been terrible for you. To kill your own husband by mistake, I mean."

"Yes. It was terrible."

"As I recall, you thought he was a prowler. You shot him with a shotgun, I believe, as he was coming up the stairs. The light on the stairs, I remember, had gone out for some reason."

"There was a prowler scare in the neighborhood. James had left the shotgun, loaded, in our room. I wasn't expecting him home that night, and I was terrified. The recollection is painful, however, and I'd rather not discuss it."

"Forgive me. The inquest, of course, was quite brief. Hardly more than a formality. You had, it seemed, absolutely no motive for killing your husband intentionally. Besides, your condition at the time solicited a great deal of sympathy."

"I was expecting a child, if that's what you mean."

"Yes. Your daughter. A charming little girl. I met her beside the walk as I came up to the house. We played a game of jacks."

"She's rather casual with strangers. It disturbs me sometimes."

"I envy you. I have no child of my own, even after two marriages. I remember how astonished I was when I first learned that you were going to have one."

"Really? I wonder why."

"I was, as I said, your husband's first wife." Cora smiled gently and looked away for a few moments with an air of abstraction, as if the remembrance were pleasant, although a little sad. "It was quite impossible for him to have children."

Julia Morrow was also suddenly withdrawn. Only a faint expression of fastidious distaste indicated that she had heard the words and understood their implication.

"That's absurd," she said. "Are you suggesting that James was mutilated like that foolish character in the Hemingway novel?"

"Nothing so romantic." Cora laughed softly and returned her gaze to the woman across the arc of glass. "To use your own term, it was really rather absurd. A kind of bad joke. Orchitis is the name for it. A complication of mumps." She laughed again, softly, with a note of genuine amusement. "It was terribly humiliating to a man as

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vain as poor James. You don't object to my calling him James, do you? It made him a comic character in his own eyes, and he wouldn't have dreamed of confiding in anyone about his misfortune. At the time of his death, his doctor having died before him, I rather imagine no one alive was aware of it except three people. You and me, Mrs. Morrow, and James himself. I wonder, if it had been generally known, how it would have affected the inquest—in the matter of motive, I mean. It's an interesting speculation, isn't it?"

"Not particularly." Julia Morrow's voice, under perfect control, was the vocal equivalent of her fastidious expression. "I find it boring, as well as absurd. However, allowing the motive, I should think it would have worked in reverse. The wrong person was killed."

"It might seem so, superficially. However, you must admit that we are in the position of *knowing* who was killed and who was not." Cora was silent for a few seconds, seeming to consider what she had said, and then she spoke again casually. "Tell me, Mrs. Morrow, why *did* you kill him? Was he going to divorce you? But of course he was. He was so vain, poor dear, that he could never have tolerated infidelity in his wife, even at the price of publicizing his own indequacy. Under the circumstances, it would have been a disaster, wouldn't it? You would have received nothing, of course. As it is, you now have all that you need, haven't you?"

"You twist my words against me." Julia spoke and then was still. If she was shocked or greatly concerned, she didn't show it. After a while she sighed. "What do you want, Cora Rogan? Surely you realize that it would be extremely difficult to establish anything against me after so long a time."

"It's hard to tell." Cora reflected and shrugged. "Who knows what would happen if it were all to be revived? At the worst, ruin. At the best, a great deal of unpleasantness. Especially, it seems to me, for the charming little girl I met on my way to the house. Did I tell you that we played a game of jacks?"

Julia Morrow rose abruptly and moved a few steps away. She stood for a minute staring across the sunlit yard to a row of Russian olive trees at the rear, silvery-green in the light, and then she turned and came back to the table; but did not sit down again.

Cora smiled secretively.

"Why have you waited so long?" Julia Morrow said.

"I am not an avaricious person," Cora said. "Until recently I lived well and had no need. Now I'm in need."

"Tell me what you want."

"What do I want?" Cora spoke dreamily, like a child with an impossible wish. "I think, more than anything else, I should like to return to Europe and live the rest of

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my life there. I know of a small villa in the south of France where I could live quite cheaply. For one who is clever in making the best of things, fifty thousand dollars should be quite sufficient for me—for a long, long time."

"For the rest of one's life, I should think."

"Yes. For the rest of one's life."

Julia Morrow sat down. She closed her eyes, apparently tired, but her face was composed.

"Are you sure I can't offer you some tea before you go?" she said.

"Quite sure." It was Cora Rogan's time to stand. "I've intruded long enough."

"Are you staying nearby?"

"At the hotel in town."

"How uncomfortable for you. The accommodations are deplorable, I understand, but of course there are very few guests in such a small place. You probably won't want to stay long."

"I hope to leave tomorrow afternoon. I'm expecting a small package before then."

"I'm sure you won't be disappointed."

"You're very kind and thank you again for seeing me."

Cora left without looking back; but she did not go, as she had come, through the house. She walked around the outside along a walk bordering beds of bright flowers, and so past the fountain and around the concrete curve to the white birch and the little girl.

"Did you see Mother?"

"Yes. We had a nice talk."

"Did she give you something for your charity?"

"She's thinking about it. I'm sure she will."

"I'm glad. Would you like to play another game of jacks?"

"No, thank you. I really must go."

"All right. I guess I had better go back to the house now, anyway. Goodbye."

Cora watched her go up the walk alone. For a few yards she walked sedately, and then she broke suddenly into the gait that seems peculiar to small girls—something between a trot and a skip, or perhaps a little of both by turns.

Standing under the white birch and staring after her, Cora had suddenly so intense and terrible a sense of loss and loneliness that she cried softly aloud, unaware, in anguish. In that instant the small villa in the south of France was a far and empty place of exile, and she envied the vulnerable woman she had just left on the terrace—the woman who had saved something, as Cora had not, from the sterile years.

The girl had gone away and left her jacks in a little pile on the grass beside the walk. Bending down, Cora picked up the small metal pieces and dropped them into a pocket of her linen jacket.

She would keep them, she thought, as a memento of this day—and all the spent days before.

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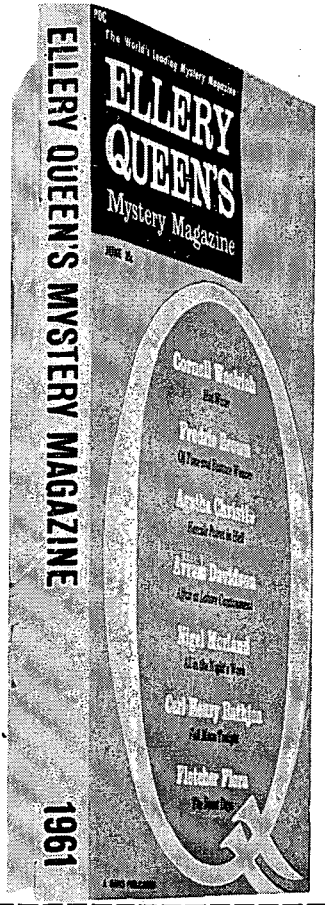

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